From Port to Parish

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Dedication

For my grandmother, Loretta A. Perret Blanchard, my mother, Nyra, my aunt Barbara, and for Lisa, Wendy, Jessica, Taylor, Marlisa, Azia, Maria, Chloe, and little Miss Loretta Mann. With my whole heart and soul, I dedicate this to every ancestor who waltzed the cobblestoned streets of the Vieux Carré in search of work, life, and love and to my family, present and future, who walk those same paths still.

You know the feeling. In the *Quarter* through the *Marigny*, an energy you cannot see or touch, only feel. It lives in your blood-line. It stretches across miles of hardwood floors flanking swamp-covered land, over the rumble of consecrated bones and the thump of second-line drums. As we raise a glass to the crystal chandeliers and champagne, we smile. This is who we are. We are New Orleans Creoles, and Creole New Orleans is us.

Introduction

A Legacy Remembered

There are families whose histories are written in courthouses and archives, and there are families whose histories are written in kitchens, in prayers, and in the quiet persistence of people who refused to be erased. The Borée family of New Orleans is both.

Anatole Louis Borée, my second great-grandfather, was a man of the port. He moved through the crowded, humid streets of nineteenth-century New Orleans as a public official, a commercial intermediary, and a laborer, occupying roles that placed him at the intersection of governance, Atlantic trade, and the daily work of survival. He was, by the account of at least one contemporary newspaper, a "respectable colored man," a phrase that, filtered through the distance of more than a century and a half, carries both the condescension of its era and the quiet dignity of a man who clearly warranted it. He served the city. He served his family. And when the political tides turned against him, he adapted not with resignation, but with the particular kind of endurance that I have come to understand as something close to a genetic inheritance.

I did not learn about Anatole Louis Borée from a textbook. I learned about him the way most Creole children learn about the people who came before them: through proximity, through ritual, through the senses.

My maternal grandmother carried the Creole world with her in everything she did in the food she prepared, in the traditions she kept, in the way she moved through a room as though the room owed her a measure of dignity and she was perfectly prepared to collect it. I did not know, in those years, that I was absorbing a history. I knew only that something was being passed to me, something that had no name but was entirely real. What I feel for Anatole Louis Borée is not simply a genealogical connection. It is something I carry not just in my blood but *en mi alma* in my soul. It is the feeling of recognizing in a stranger's face the echo of your own.

That recognition is the origin of this book.

The Purpose of This Work

From Port to Parish: A Creole Family's Journey Through Reconstruction Louisiana is a work of microhistory, a sustained examination of one family across multiple generations, situated within the broader historical forces that shaped and constrained their lives. Its subject is Anatole Louis Borée and his descendants: his widow, Josephine, likely born Lavilotte or Laviolette; his daughter Marie, an educator in Reconstruction-era New Orleans; his daughter Adelaide, who would carry the family name into the Cane River region through her marriage into the Perret family; and Loretta Perret Blanchard, whose presence in the Seventh Ward of New Orleans represents the culmination of a multigenerational journey from port to parish, from political precarity to rooted community life.

But this is not only a family history. It is, more precisely, an argument — an argument that the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people of color in Reconstruction-era Louisiana contain within them a richness of historical meaning that macro-level analyses consistently obscure. When historians speak of Reconstruction, they speak of legislation, of constitutional amendments, of political careers, and their collapse. They speak of Pinchback and of patronage, of the Freedmen's Bureau and the failure of federal protection. These are essential frameworks. But they are incomplete without the texture of lived experience: without the woman who holds a household together after her husband's death, without the daughter who stands in front of a classroom and insists on the intellectual life of her community, without the man who unloads coal from a flatboat and does so with his dignity intact.

This book insists on that texture. It insists on it not as a corrective sentiment, but as a scholarly commitment. Microhistory, as a methodology, proceeds from the conviction that the small is not less than the large, that it is, in fact, where the large becomes legible. The Borée family's story does not merely illustrate the history of Reconstruction in Louisiana. It illuminates it. Through their experiences, we can see with greater clarity the instability of Black and Creole political authority, the centrality of Catholic institutions to cultural continuity, the role of women in sustaining

households and communities, and the enduring networks of kinship and faith that made survival not merely possible but meaningful.

A Note on Sources

The reconstruction of any nineteenth-century family of color is, by necessity, an act of recovery as much as research. The archives that document these lives are incomplete — shaped by the priorities of those who created them, by the destruction of records, and by the simple fact that communities whose power was circumscribed rarely left the kind of documentary footprint that power tends to generate. What survives, however, is more than sufficient to tell a compelling story, and it is the work of the historian to read these sources with both rigor and imagination.

The primary archival foundation of this study includes contemporaneous newspaper accounts, most significantly a notice published in *The New Orleans Bulletin* on July 9, 1874, which identifies Borée as a commercial agent of the Haitian government and characterizes him with the phrase that recurs throughout this book: a "respectable colored man." City directory records, particularly the New Orleans City Directory of 1874, provide crucial documentation of the family's household composition following Borée's death, confirming the address at 362 Burgundy Street and Marie L. Borée's employment as a teacher at St. Andrew Public School. Freedmen's Bureau records from August 1867 place Anatole L. Borée and his family within a specific historical moment, offering details of occupation, residence, and family structure that anchor the narrative in documented fact. Legal records from the Superior Third District Court, specifically the case of *State of Louisiana ex rel. A.P. Field and Vassier, E., vs. Anatole Borée* document the legal contest over his position as Inspector of Weights and Measures and illuminate the factionalism of Reconstruction-era governance. A passenger manifest documenting the Borée family's arrival from Haiti to New Orleans adds a transnational dimension to the record, confirming the family's participation in the circuits of Caribbean and Gulf South mobility that defined the Black Atlantic world.

To these documentary sources, this study adds the interpretive framework of Catholic sacramental reconstruction. The parishes of New Orleans — St. Augustine

Catholic Church, St. Louis Cathedral, and others maintained detailed registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials that preserve information unavailable in civil records: maternal surnames, godparent relationships, multiple given names, and the spelling conventions of French and Spanish administrative periods. These records are not merely supplementary. They are, in many cases, the primary means by which Creole family networks can be reconstructed across generations. The recurrence of the middle initial "L." in the names of both Marie L. Borée and Adelaide L. Borée, for instance, points toward a maternal surname, almost certainly Lavilotte or Laviolette, that has informed the hypothesis about Josephine Borée's family of origin. This kind of evidence, circumstantial by the standards of civil documentation but consistent with Creole naming conventions, represents the methodological terrain that genealogical history must navigate. It is terrain that rewards careful attention.

The study also draws on oral family lineage, the accumulated memory of descendants who have preserved, across generations, a sense of who these people were and what they stood for. Oral tradition is not a substitute for archival documentation, but neither is it simply anecdote. In communities where official records were inconsistently kept or deliberately obscured, memory has often been the primary archive. The knowledge that Anatole Louis Borée was a man of dignity, that his descendants became educators and lawyers and judges, that the instinct to endure was passed down as something close to a cultural inheritance — this knowledge did not emerge from a database. It was carried, person to person, generation to generation, until it reached me.

Framing: Microhistory, Creole Identity, and Reconstruction

Three scholarly frameworks organize this book, each of them essential to the argument it makes.

The first is microhistory. Pioneered by Italian historians of the *Annales* tradition and developed through works that range across continents and centuries, microhistory proceeds from the conviction that the individual case, the exception, the anomaly, the life that falls between the categories of macro-analysis, can reveal structural realities that broader approaches obscure. Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*, and, closer to the present study, Annette Gordon-Reed's *The Hemingses of Monticello,* these works demonstrate what becomes visible when historians commit to the granular texture of a single life or family. This book stands within that tradition, while insisting on its application to a community that has too often been rendered marginal even within the scholarship dedicated to marginalized communities.

The second framework is Creole identity, a concept that is at once historically specific and genuinely complex. In nineteenth-century Louisiana, "Creole" designated a range of identities shaped by French and Spanish colonial heritage, by African ancestry and culture, by Catholic faith, and by a particular relationship to the French language and its patois forms. Free people of color occupied a distinctive position within this matrix: educated, often propertied, deeply embedded in Catholic institutional life, and yet subject at any moment to the racial violence and political disenfranchisement that structured the postbellum South. Scholars, including Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Kimberly S. Hanger, and Emily Clark, have illuminated this world with precision and depth. This book builds upon their work while adding a multigenerational and transnational dimension following the Borée family not only through New Orleans but across the Gulf South and into the Caribbean circuits that connected them to Haiti and beyond.

The third framework is Reconstruction itself, understood not as a discrete political episode bounded by the years 1865 to 1877, but as a long and contested process of social transformation whose effects extended well into the twentieth century.

Reconstruction brought Black and Creole men into positions of political authority they had never before occupied, and it stripped them of those positions with equal speed. It created schools and established communities, and it watched those communities be dismantled by violence and legal maneuvering. To study Reconstruction through the lens of a single family is to feel, at close range, both the extraordinary possibilities of that moment and the extraordinary forces arrayed against them.

Chapter 1

A Man of the Port: Creole Life Before and During Reconstruction

I. The City at the Edge of the World

To understand Anatole Louis Borée, one must first understand the city that made him.

New Orleans in the mid-nineteenth century was like no other place in the United States, and it knew it. Perched at the mouth of the Mississippi River, bracketed by Lake Pontchartrain to the north and the slow, muscular current of the river to the south, the city occupied a position of geographic improbability and commercial consequence. It was the point at which the vast interior of the American continent met the Gulf of Mexico, and through it flowed an almost incomprehensible volume of goods: cotton and sugar from the plantation economy of the Deep South, timber and grain from the interior, manufactured goods arriving by ship from Europe and the Caribbean. By the 1850s, New Orleans was the wealthiest city in the South and one of the busiest ports in the world.

But commerce alone does not explain the city. What made New Orleans singular was its layering of the extraordinary accumulation of languages, cultures, religions, and identities that two centuries of French, Spanish, African, and Caribbean influence had deposited within its geography like sediment on the river's bank. French was spoken in the drawing rooms of the Vieux Carré and Latin in the Catholic parishes that anchored every neighborhood. Spanish colonial law had shaped property rights and family structures in ways that persisted long after the Louisiana Purchase transferred nominal sovereignty to the United States. African rhythms had woven themselves into the city's music, food, ritual life, and speech. And from Hispaniola, Saint-Domingue, as it had been known, had come tens of thousands of refugees and migrants in the early years of the nineteenth century, bringing with them a Creole culture that deepened and complicated everything it touched.

This was the world into which Anatole Louis Borée moved. It was a world of extraordinary richness and extraordinary danger, of possibility and precarity existing in such proximity that the distance between them could be measured in the length of a political appointment, the outcome of a court case, or the direction of a shifting wind off the river.

The streets of the city were, in those years, an experience of the senses as much as of the mind. The air along the waterfront carried the smell of salt water and coal smoke, of freshly caught fish and the sweetish rot of tropical fruit unloaded from Caribbean vessels. The sound of the port was a continuous symphony of human effort: the rhythmic calls of dockworkers coordinating heavy loads, the creak and groan of wooden ships against their moorings, the negotiating voices of merchants and factors conducting the business of a continent. Open-air markets spread along the levee and through the neighborhoods of the French Quarter, selling provisions that reflected the city's position at the crossroads of Atlantic commerce. Languages overlapped and merged: French and English, Spanish, New Orleans and Haitian Creole, the patois of Louisiana's own particular synthesis.

Into this city, in 1852, just eight years before the Civil War, came the Borée family. They arrived as passengers aboard the brig schooner *Billy Butts of Dartmouth*, Massachusetts, a small 112-ton commercial vessel commanded by Captain W. H. Leppert. The ship's manifest, sailing from the Port of Hayti (Haiti) and bound for New Orleans, documents their passage: Anatole Louis Borée, 38, a merchant and United States citizen traveling with his family in a cabin; his wife Josephine Borée, 31; their daughter Marie L. Borée, 13; and their six-year-old Aurore Borée, who would later be called Adelaide.

This record places the family within the specific current of Haitian migration that had been reshaping New Orleans since the early decades of the century. Yet the manifest raises as many questions as it answers. The man listed as arriving from Haiti in 1852 would, fifteen years later, stand before a Freedmen's Bureau agent in Carrollton,

Louisiana, and declare his birthplace as New Orleans. The child who crossed the Gulf as Aurore would appear in that same 1867 record as Adelaide, her name already transformed by the family's negotiation of American bureaucracy. These documents do not simply record a journey; they capture a family in motion, adapting, claiming, surviving.

The Billy Butts was not a luxury passenger liner but a hybrid cargo vessel square-rigged on her foremast and fore-and-aft rigged on her mainmast, typical of the multi-purpose ships that connected Caribbean, Gulf Coast, and Atlantic seaboard ports in the mid-1800s. Such vessels carried cotton and goods while also accommodating a small number of passengers when space allowed, operating within the informal maritime networks that made transnational movement possible for families like the Borées.

They were not, by any measure, arriving as strangers to a foreign shore. They were arriving in a city that was, in many respects, an extension of the Caribbean world, a city where their language, their Catholic faith, their cultural references, and their social networks would find ready purchase. They were coming home to a place they had never lived, or perhaps, as the 1867 record suggests, they were returning to a place that had made them.

The gap between the ship manifest and official record is not merely bureaucratic delay; it is a window onto the complex geography of Creole identity. The 1860 Census, enumerating the family eight years after their arrival, found them established residents, not newcomers, not immigrants in the fresh shock of arrival, but a household already woven into the fabric of the city. Anatole, then 46, and Josephine, 39, appeared alongside their children, their ages advanced, their lives in New Orleans already eight years deep. But the 1867 Freedmen's Bureau register, created in the turbulent aftermath of emancipation, reveals something more: a man who identified himself as Anatole L. Borée, Commission Merchant, born in New Orleans, who signed his own name with the confidence of literacy and the authority of commerce. He stood in Carrollton, then a suburb of New Orleans, a streetcar ride away from the Vieux Carré, now part of the city

itself, not as a refugee from Haiti, but as a native son, a voter, a property-holder, a man whose very signature declared his standing.

This transformation from "merchant" on a ship's manifest to "Commission Merchant" signing his name in 1867 marks more than career advancement. It represents survival as a strategy, identity as a negotiation. The Borée lineage traces what we might call the resilient Middle Passage of the nineteenth century: not forced migration in chains, but calculated movement between Caribbean and Gulf, the preservation of family across political upheaval, the claiming of American citizenship while maintaining Creole culture. Anatole's signature on the 1867 register serves as a defiant marker of agency; while the smoke of the Civil War was still clearing, he stood in Carrollton not merely as a "freedman," but as a literate merchant navigating the new American economy.

The discrepancy in birthplace, Haiti in 1852, New Orleans in 1867, opens three possibilities, each reflecting different dimensions of Creole experience. The evidence suggests we should weigh these interpretations not equally, but in relation to the documentary record and the broader patterns of Haitian-New Orleans migration.

The most probable interpretation: *Circular migration and transnational commercial identity*. Anatole Borée was likely born in New Orleans to a family already embedded in the Saint-Domingue refugee network, spent formative years in Haiti (perhaps managing family commercial interests or receiving education), and returned with his own family in 1852. This reading aligns with several documentary clues: his United States citizenship declared on the ship manifest; his merchant occupation suggesting established commercial training; and the cabin passage indicating resources consistent with a return journey rather than desperate migration.

The 1867 declaration of New Orleans birth represents not deception but an accurate claim to nativity, an assertion of belonging that the 1852 arrival had temporarily obscured. This interpretation makes the Borées emblematic of a

transnational commercial class that moved fluidly between port cities, maintaining assets, relationships, and legal standing on both sides of the Caribbean.

A secondary possibility: The "Saint-Domingue" identity as cultural geography. The category "New Orleans" in 1867 may function less as a precise birthplace than as a cultural origin shorthand for the Creole world that the Haitian Revolution had dispersed. Many families in the Saint-Domingue refugee community understood themselves as "from" New Orleans, regardless of actual birth location, because the city represented the primary site of their family's reconstitution after 1804. In this reading, the 1867 record captures not demographic fact but social truth: Anatole Borée was "from" New Orleans in the same way that a member of a diaspora is "from" the city where their people rebuilt their world,the 1852 manifest records movement; the 1867 record claims belonging.

The least probable but historically significant interpretation: Legal strategy and protective claim. In the pre-Civil War South, foreign-born free people of color faced distinct vulnerabilities, threats of deportation, exclusion from certain protections, and suspicion of revolutionary sympathies. A family arriving from Haiti in 1852, as the American sectional crisis deepened, might have cultivated a narrative of local origin as insurance against uncertainty. By 1867, with emancipation transforming the legal landscape, claiming New Orleans' birth became politically advantageous, securing voting rights, property protections, and social standing within the reconstructed order. This interpretation does not require that the claim be false; rather, it recognizes that the same fact could serve different protective functions across the rupture of the Civil War.

These interpretations are not mutually exclusive. The Borée family may have experienced all three dimensions: actual circular migration, cultural identification with New Orleans as homeland, and strategic deployment of nativity claims as political circumstances required. The documentary record does not permit definitive resolution; it offers, instead, a methodological object lesson in how Creole families navigated regimes of documentation that were simultaneously tools of state surveillance and instruments of self-fashioning.

By then, young Aurore had become Adelaide. She would grow to marry François Perret in New Orleans, and their union would produce a daughter, Loretta Adelaide Perret, who would live to become grandmother to the author of this history. The girl who crossed the Gulf on a cargo schooner in 1852 or who was born in the city her parents returned to that year thus stands at the head of a line that runs, unbroken, to the present. The document that recorded the family in 1860 was not a snapshot of arrival but a belated acknowledgment of presence. The 1867 Freedmen's Bureau record was something more: a claim to belonging, signed in a man's own hand.

II. The Architecture of Creole Society

To speak of *les gens de couleur libres*, the free people of color in nineteenth-century New Orleans, is to speak of a community whose complexity resists the flattening categories that history has too often imposed upon it. The word "free" in that designation requires immediate qualification. It did not mean freedom in the sense that the Anglo-American imagination tends to project onto it an absence of constraint, a full participation in civic life, an equality before the law. It meant, rather, a specific legal status within a stratified society, a status that conferred certain protections and certain possibilities while leaving intact a web of racial, political, and social constraints that could tighten at any moment. *Libre* was not liberation. It was a position negotiated, maintained, and perpetually subject to challenge.

To understand that position fully, one must begin not with the Anglo-American period but with the colonial foundations that preceded it. Under French and Spanish governance, Louisiana developed social and legal frameworks that bore little resemblance to the binary racial order that American expansion would eventually impose. The Spanish concept of *criollo* from which the English "Creole" derives, carried specific meaning within the colonial world: it designated those born in the New World rather than in the home country, a distinction that cut across racial lines and reflected the realities of a colonial society in which mixture, *mestizaje*, was not an aberration but a constitutive fact. Spanish colonial law recognized gradations of ancestry and status:

mestizo, mulato, pardo, and moreno each carrying distinct legal implications, each reflecting the lived complexity of a society shaped by the encounter of European, African, and indigenous peoples. Under this system, freedom could be purchased, inherited, or granted, and the free person of color occupied a recognized, if circumscribed, place within the social order.

The French colonial tradition added its own layer. Les Créoles of French Louisiana understood themselves as a people formed by the specific geography and history of the lower Mississippi valley, shaped by the river, by the sugar and cotton economies, by the Catholic faith that structured their spiritual and social lives, by the French language that remained the medium of their most intimate expressions long after English became the language of governance. When the Americans arrived in force after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, *les Américains*, as they were called with a mixture of wariness and contempt, brought with them a racial system that recognized only two categories: white and not white. The nuanced architecture of colonial Louisiana, with its multiple gradations and its recognition of an educated, propertied free-colored community as a distinct social class, struck the Anglo-American newcomers as incomprehensible at best and threatening at worst.

It was within this collision of social systems that the Creole community of color defined and defended its identity. And the means of that defense were multiple, deliberate, and deeply rooted in cultural practice.

Chief among them was the practice of *endogamie* the preference for marriage within the community, and often within the extended family network itself. *Parrans* and nannans' godfathers and godmothers were not merely ceremonial figures in the Catholic sacramental tradition. They were the architects of a kinship network that bound families together across generations, creating webs of mutual obligation, shared property, and social solidarity that functioned, in many respects, like the dynastic alliances of older aristocratic societies. To marry a cousin, to choose as godparents the children of one's own godparents, to maintain the circulation of names and property within a defined community, these were not simply expressions of cultural preference.

They were strategies of survival, enacted with the deliberateness of people who understood that in a hostile legal and political environment, the consolidation of community was the most reliable form of protection available.

The economic dimension of this practice was inseparable from the cultural one. Property, land, buildings, businesses, and the accumulated wealth of generations were held within these networks with careful attention to inheritance and continuity. The same Catholic sacramental records that preserved family names and godparent relationships also functioned as instruments of economic memory, documenting the transmission of assets through family lines. This was especially vital because Louisiana, alone among American states, retained the *Code Napoléon* French civil law that permitted women to inherit property directly from their fathers and allowed free people of color to own and bequeath wealth with legal standing that American common law often denied them. Where civil records elsewhere in the United States were shaped by legal systems that restricted the claims of women and free people of color, Louisiana's French-derived law offered a framework of protection that the sacramental records both relied upon and reinforced.

Anatole Borée's position as Commission Merchant in 1867 must be understood within this legal and commercial architecture. A commission merchant acted as intermediary in wholesale trade, buying and selling goods on behalf of others, handling cotton, coffee, sugar, the very products that flowed through New Orleans as the *entrepôt* of the Mississippi Valley. To hold this position required capital, literacy, trust, and connections, precisely the resources that Creole family networks cultivated and protected. That Borée signed his own name, rather than making his mark, indicates an education that predated emancipation, suggesting a family that had maintained its status across the transition from the old world to the new world, from Hispañiola origin to American claim.

Crucially, Borée operated not from the crowded center of the Vieux Carré but from Carrollton, a quiet suburb connected to the city by streetcar, distinct in its residential character yet fully integrated into its commercial networks. This geography

mattered. Carrollton allowed a man of color to establish a household, conduct business, and raise a family with a degree of spatial separation from the intense racial surveillance of the city center, while remaining close enough to participate in the port's commercial life. The streetcar that connected Carrollton to the Vieux Carré was more than transportation; it was a lifeline that permitted Borée to serve as an agent of New Orleans to the Caribbean to maintain the relationships, languages, and commercial intelligence that made him valuable to both his community and the city's economy.

To keep property within the family was to keep it safe. To keep blood within the community was to keep identity intact.

This insularity was frequently misread and continues to be misread by those outside the community. *On ne comprend pas ce qu'on ne connaît pas.* One cannot understand what one does not know. The Creole community's preference for its own company, its own institutions, its own marriage networks, appeared to Anglo-American observers and sometimes to newly arrived Black Americans from other regions as a form of prejudice, a looking down upon those who did not share the particular mixture of French, Spanish, African, and Caribbean ancestry that defined the community. This interpretation, however understandable given the opacity of the community's internal logic to outside eyes, fundamentally misreads what was happening. The Creoles of color did not exclude others because they considered themselves superior in the crude racial sense that structured Anglo-American society. They were protecting something: a language, a faith, a set of cultural practices, a way of moving through the world that they understood could be lost if the boundaries of the community were dissolved.

The distinction matters, and this book insists upon it. What looked like arrogance from the outside was, from the inside, fierté pride and something more: a form of collective intelligence about survival. A community that had navigated French colonialism, Spanish colonialism, the disruptions of the Haitian Revolution, the Louisiana Purchase, the antebellum slave economy, and the Civil War had learned, through long and costly experience, that coherence was not a luxury. It was a necessity.

Language was perhaps the most immediate expression of this coherence and the most practical instrument of Creole adaptability. Most members of the educated Creole community spoke at minimum two languages, and frequently three or more: French as the language of home, faith, and intimate life; Spanish as the inheritance of the colonial period and the medium of Caribbean commerce; English as the language of the American governing order that had to be navigated, appealed to, and when necessary, outmaneuvered. Le français, el español, l'anglais each language was a key to a different door, and the Creole who held all three keys held a form of power that was invisible to those who possessed only one. This linguistic agility was not assimilation in the sense of abandonment. It was strategic fluency the capacity to speak the language of whatever government, whatever court, whatever commercial partner the moment required, while returning home to a table where French was spoken, and gumbo was served, and the names of the ancestors were still known.

Anatole Borée possessed this fluency in full measure, and he deployed it as both shield and instrument. His education evident in his signature, his commercial success, his navigation of three political regimes placed him in a unique position to leverage New Orleans' international character. The city at the edge of the world needed men who could move between its worlds: the French-speaking Creole community, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, the English-speaking American commercial and political system. Borée was perfectly positioned to utilize his education, language acquisition, and intimate knowledge of New Orleans to make a name for himself and his family while adjusting and leveraging a political climate that could turn against him at any moment.

Food, indeed, was its own form of cultural memory. The cuisine of the New Orleans Creole community gumbo, jambalaya, pain perdu, calas, the intricate spiced dishes that bore the imprint of West African, Caribbean, French, and Spanish culinary traditions was not merely sustenance. It was a living archive. Every dish was a record of where the community had been, what it had absorbed, what it had made its own. To sit at a Creole table was to sit within history, tasting the evidence of a synthesis that no document could fully capture.

It was into this world, layered, deliberate, multilingual, fiercely cohesive, that Anatole Louis Borée moved as a man of standing and purpose. His family's Catholic faith, their French language, their participation in Atlantic commercial networks all of these marked him as a recognizable figure within the Creole community of New Orleans, a man whose credentials were legible to those who knew how to read them. He was not an outsider seeking admission. He was, in the deepest sense, des nôtres one of ours arriving to take his place within a community that had been preparing a place for people like him for generations.

That place, however, was never entirely secure. The same forces that had shaped the Creole community the collision of colonial legal systems, the instability of racial categories under American governance, the constant negotiation between visibility and vulnerability would shape Borée's own trajectory in ways that the following chapters will trace. But to understand that trajectory, one must first understand the community from which he came and to which he belonged: not as a curiosity, not as a footnote to the larger story of Black life in the South, but as a society with its own internal logic, its own history, and its own profound understanding of what it meant to endure.

II. Inspector of Weights and Measures

The appointment of Anatole L. Borée as Inspector of Weights and Measures for the 3rd District represents not the beginning of his public career but its culmination the moment when a man already established as a Commission Merchant, already recorded as a voter in the first registration of Black male citizens, entered municipal service. The 1867 Freedmen's Bureau record places him in Carrollton, the suburb that would become the 3rd District of New Orleans, suggesting that his political geography was also his commercial geography. He did not travel to the city center to conduct his business; he built his business where he lived, among the Creole community that had settled beyond the original city limits.

The position of Inspector was, on its surface, a technical regulatory role: ensuring the accuracy of scales and measures used in commercial transactions, verifying that the tools of commerce met municipal standards. But for a Commission Merchant to hold this office was to occupy a gatekeeper position at the very point where goods entered the port economy. Every cotton bale, every sugar hogshead, every barrel of molasses that passed through the 3rd District was measured according to standards he enforced. His literacy and numeracy demonstrated by his signature in 1867 were not merely personal traits but instruments of state authority, allowing him to navigate the complex maritime law of the era while remaining embedded in the community whose economic life he helped regulate.

This appointment must be understood in the context of New Orleans' unique position as an international port connecting the Caribbean and North America. The city's direct links to Haiti and Cuba the large sugar plantation islands of the Caribbean created commercial networks that required intermediaries with specific skills: linguistic fluency in French and Spanish, knowledge of Caribbean commercial practices, literacy sufficient for complex documentation, and the trust of both local and international merchants. Anatole Borée possessed all of these. His role as Inspector of Weights and Measures was not merely local regulation; it was the domestic face of international commerce, the point where New Orleans' function as liaison between the world, the Caribbean, and the remainder of North America was made tangible and enforceable.

The legal record documents the fragility of this position with unsentimental clarity. A case before the Superior Third District Court State of Louisiana ex rel. A.P. Field and Vassier, E., vs. Anatole Borée records the contest over his office, in which another claimant sought to compel Borée to vacate his position. The suit describes the office as one "to which said Vassier had been appointed and commissioned," suggesting that Borée's tenure had become entangled in precisely the kind of factional conflict that characterized Reconstruction-era patronage politics. The case was not simply about who held a municipal appointment; it was a contest over the terms of Black and Creole political participation in a city whose political order was in constant negotiation.

The connection to P.B.S. Pinchback is instructive. Pinchback, the son of a white planter and a formerly enslaved woman, had risen to remarkable prominence in Reconstruction Louisiana, serving as state senator, lieutenant governor, and briefly as acting governor the first man of African descent to hold a governorship in the United States. His political career demonstrated what an expanded franchise made possible, and also the factionalism and instability that defined that era's politics. The patronage systems that Pinchback navigated, the contests over municipal appointments that characterized his tenure these were the same systems that touched Borée's career. His removal from office during Pinchback's political ascendancy reflects not simple dispossession but the complex story of how Black and Creole political authority was organized, contested, and ultimately constrained within Reconstruction governance.

Yet even in removal, Borée's position reveals his strategic acumen. He had leveraged education, language, commercial knowledge, and geographic positioning to reach municipal office a height rarely achieved by men of color in nineteenth-century America. That he could be removed demonstrates the precarity of that achievement; that he achieved it at all demonstrates the possibilities that New Orleans' unique international character created for those who could navigate its complexities.

IV. The Haitian Connection

The newspaper account that identifies Borée as a commercial agent of the Haitian government for New Orleans opens a window onto a dimension of his life that municipal records alone would not reveal. Yet this identification must be read alongside the 1867 Freedmen's Bureau record, where he declared himself born in New Orleans. These two documents are not contradictory; they are complementary, mapping the complex terrain of Creole commercial identity.

To function as commercial agent for Haiti was to occupy a significant position within the networks of the Black Atlantic the circuits of trade, migration, and cultural exchange that linked the African diaspora across the Caribbean. Haiti's significance cannot be overstated: the Haitian Revolution was the only successful slave revolution in

world history, and its consequences rippled throughout the Atlantic world. For New Orleans, the effects were direct and transformative: the wave of refugees who fled Saint-Domingue in the early nineteenth century, white planters, free people of color, and enslaved persons arrived in the city by the tens of thousands, permanently reshaping the city's demographic and cultural character. The Haitian community they established maintained economic and familial ties to the island that persisted for generations, creating a network of commerce and communication that made New Orleans, in important respects, an outpost of Caribbean Creole culture as much as an American city.

New Orleans' direct links to Haiti and Cuba, the sugar islands of the Caribbean, made it a crucial node in Atlantic commerce. Sugar, coffee, rum, and the products of tropical plantation economies flowed through the port, requiring intermediaries who could negotiate the linguistic, cultural, and legal complexities of international trade. Anatole Borée was perfectly positioned to serve as such an intermediary. His education, his French and Spanish language skills, his residence in Carrollton (close enough to the port for commercial access, separate enough for domestic security), and his claimed New Orleans nativity all combined to make him an ideal agent between Caribbean and American commercial interests.

Anatole Borée's family's passage from Haiti in 1852, documented in the passenger manifest, places them within this living current. Yet the 1867 record complicates the narrative of simple migration. If Borée was born in New Orleans, his family's movement in 1852 may represent return rather than arrival, the reconstitution of a household that had been dispersed across the Caribbean by commerce or politics. The manifest lists co-travelers reflecting the diverse social world of the Haitian–New Orleans connection: professors, merchants, dressmakers, tailors, laborers, the full range of a mobile, commercially engaged Creole world in motion.

As a commercial agent for the Haitian government, Borée served as an intermediary in the economic relationship between two jurisdictions that had long maintained significant commercial ties. His role would have involved facilitating trade,

maintaining relationships with Haitian commercial interests, and navigating diplomatic protocols. This position, combined with his status as Commission Merchant, suggests a man whose world extended beyond New Orleans, whose identity was formed by circulation between port cities, whose professional life engaged him with the commerce and diplomacy of the Caribbean even as he claimed New Orleans as his native place.

He was, in the fullest sense, a man of the Atlantic world. And the city he inhabited was the place where that world and the American interior met.

The international character of New Orleans, with its French, Spanish, African, and indigenous-speaking populations, and its position as a port of non-white as well as white commerce, created the conditions that made Borée's career possible. In a city where the Vieux Carré looked toward Paris and the port looked toward Havana and Port-au-Prince, a man who could move between languages, legal systems, and commercial networks found opportunity alongside precarity. Borée utilized his education, his language acquisition, and his intimate knowledge of New Orleans to make a name for himself and his family, constantly adjusting to and leveraging a political climate that could turn against him at any moment. His removal from office in 1874 demonstrates that turn; his achievement of the office in the first place demonstrates his strategic mastery of the city's international character.

V. The Port as World and the Neighborhoods That Made It Home

Every city has a geography of belonging, a map that only its people can read, drawn not in streets and boundaries but in the invisible lines of kinship, faith, and shared memory that tell a community where it begins and ends. In nineteenth-century New Orleans, that map was known instinctively by every Creole family that had lived within it long enough to learn its language. And its language was not English, nor entirely French, nor Spanish, though all three were spoken along its routes. Its language was the language of the sacraments, of the table, of the front porch, and the parish hall, the accumulated grammar of a people who had learned, across generations, that the surest defense against a hostile world was the cultivation of an unbreakable interior one.

The Borée family, arriving from what was San Domingo and stepping onto the levee of New Orleans, did not enter a city so much as they entered a constellation. The neighborhoods of Creole New Orleans were not simply residential districts. They were distinct social worlds, each with its own character and its own parish anchor, connected by the invisible threads of family, faith, and cultural memory that made them, together, something larger than the sum of their parts.

At the center, oldest and most storied, lay the Vieux Carré, the old square, the original French colonial grid that still organized the city's oldest spaces around the axis of the St. Louis Cathedral. La cathédrale was not merely a church. It was the spiritual and social center of Creole Catholic life, the place where the most significant moments of a family's existence, baptism, marriage, burial, were solemnized and recorded. Its bells marked time for the entire community, and its sacramental registers, maintained with the careful attention of generations of priests, preserved in their columns of names and dates the genealogical memory of a people whose civil records were often incomplete, contested, or deliberately obscured. To be baptized at St. Louis Cathedral was to be written into a record that no political upheaval could easily erase.

Just beyond the Vieux Carré, pressing against its northern edge with the particular vitality of a community that had made something extraordinary out of constrained circumstances, lay the Tremé, the oldest African American neighborhood in the United States, and one of the most culturally generative urban spaces in the history of the country. It was here that les gens de couleur libres had established some of their deepest institutional roots: benevolent societies, schools, and the gathering places where the social life of the community was organized and sustained. The Tremé was also the neighborhood most directly connected to the musical traditions that would eventually give the world jazz, not as a curiosity or an accident, but as the direct expression of a community that had been making beauty out of difficulty for as long as it had existed. Congo Square, where enslaved and free Black people gathered on Sundays to play music, trade, and maintain cultural connections that the plantation system was designed to sever, lay at the Tremé's edge a reminder that the freedom of *les libres* was always

shadowed by the bondage of those who had not yet obtained it, and that the community's cultural life was shaped by both.

Further along the Creole geography of the city lay the suburb of Carrollton, where Anatole Borée established his household and his business. Carrollton was not simply a residential choice; it was a strategic positioning. A streetcar ride from the Vieux Carré, it offered spatial separation from the intense surveillance of the city center while maintaining full access to the port's commercial networks. For a man of color conducting international business serving as a commercial agent for Haiti, acting as a commission merchant in the sugar and coffee trades, Carrollton provided a domestic base that was simultaneously connected and protected. The suburb's quiet streets allowed for the raising of a family, the conducting of business, the maintenance of the godparent networks and sacramental life that sustained Creole identity, without the constant exposure to the racial tensions of the urban core.

Across the arc of the Borée family's history, Carrollton would become the neighborhood most intimately associated with their lives, the place where Anatole signed his name in 1867, where he held municipal office, where his daughter Adelaide would marry and raise her own family. The Seventh Ward, which would later become central to the family's descendants, inherited this pattern: densely settled, Catholic, French-speaking within living memory, organized around the parish structures that gave its residents their social coordinates. Corpus Christi Catholic Church would become one of its anchors, as would Saint Rose de Lima and St. Leo the Great parishes, whose names, for those who grew up within their reach, carried the weight of every baptism, every first communion, every confirmation that had been celebrated within their walls across generations.

And uptown, across the shifting social geography of a city that was always renegotiating its own boundaries, other Creole communities extended the constellation further, families maintaining the same practices, the same languages, the same intricate networks of godparentage and intermarriage that characterized the community wherever it settled. The city was large enough to contain multitudes, but the Creole

world within it was intimate enough that *tout le monde se connaissait*; everyone knew everyone. A family in the Tremé and a family in Carrollton might live twenty minutes apart by streetcar and yet be connected by a web of godparent relationships, shared parish membership, and intermarriage that made the distance between them largely ceremonial.

This was especially true when the sacramental calendar called the community together. Baptisms, confirmations, and first communions were not private family events. They were community occasions, drawing cousins from the Tremé to Carrollton, neighbors from Esplanade Ridge to North Roman Street, parrans and nannans from across the city's Creole geography to witness and celebrate the formal entry of a new soul into the community's spiritual and social life. The church was the stage, but the neighborhood was the audience, and everyone had a role to play. To attend a cousin's confirmation in another neighborhood was not an obligation. It was a pleasure, a reaffirmation, a renewal of the bonds that held the community together against the forces political, economic, and racial that were always pressing against it from the outside.

On North Roman Street, in the Seventh Ward, these bonds were made visible in a practice that distills the entire social and spiritual logic of the Creole community into a single weekly act. A *groupe du rosaire* (rosary group) gathered regularly, moving from home to home through the neighborhood with a rhythm as reliable as the river's current. At the center of each gathering was a statue of the Blessed Mother, carried from household to household, blessing each home in turn with her presence. The group possessed a relic, a fragment of the Blessed Mother's garment, preserved under a small cover of plastic that was passed from hand to hand during the prayers, each person holding it briefly, kissing it, offering through it whatever intention sat most heavily on their heart. The prayers were led by the members in turn, but the anchor of every gathering was the same: an elderly woman on her knees, moving through the entire rosary with the unhurried certainty of someone for whom this was not a religious obligation but a conversation direct, intimate, unmediated with the divine.

When the prayers were finished, the table was set. Petits fours and finger sandwiches, deviled eggs and punch the particular menu of a community that knew how to make a gathering feel like a celebration without requiring either wealth or ostentation. Special intentions were offered for the sick, for the expectant, for those facing difficulty. "Special-specials," as they were known within the group, were brought forward for members whose circumstances were most pressing, a word that carried, in the soft vowels of New Orleans Creole speech, the full weight of a community turning its collective attention toward one of its own.

This was not nostalgia. This was not the remnant of something that had once existed and was now fading. This was the living continuation of precisely the same social technology faith, kinship, the table, the shared practice of prayer that the Creole community of New Orleans had employed for generations to hold itself together against forces that would otherwise have dissolved it. The rosary group on North Roman Street was, in direct and traceable ways, the descendant of the godparent networks that appear in the sacramental records of St. Louis Cathedral, of the benevolent societies of the Tremé, of the Catholic parish life that scholars have identified as the organizational spine of Creole identity across centuries. It was what survived. It was what endured.

And it endures because someone, in every generation, chose to carry it forward.

The Borée family arrived at the port of New Orleans carrying, among their possessions, a set of values and practices that the city already knew how to receive. Their Catholic faith, their French language, their experience of community organized around kinship and parish, these were not foreign credentials requiring translation. They were the mother tongue of the world they were entering. Anatole Louis Borée would go on to serve that world in an official capacity, to navigate its political currents, to suffer its reversals and adapt to its demands but he would do so from the strategic position of Carrollton, utilizing his education and international connections to build a life that was simultaneously of the city and apart from it, connected to the Caribbean and grounded in the suburb, visible enough to achieve standing and careful enough to survive its loss.

But the world itself, the constellation of neighborhoods, the web of godparent relationships, the statue moving from house to house down a street where everyone was, in some sense, family, that world was already here, waiting.

It did not disappear when Reconstruction ended, and the political possibilities it had briefly opened were foreclosed. It did not disappear when men like Borée were removed from their offices and told, in the language of law and force, that their participation in public life was conditional and revocable. It moved indoors. It moved into the parishes, into the kitchens, into the rosary groups that gathered on Monday evenings in the homes of the Seventh Ward. It became, if anything, more concentrated, more deliberate, more conscious of its own value.

On ne comprend pas ce qu'on ne connaît pas. And what the outside world did not understand, which it has often failed to understand across the full length of Louisiana history, is that the Creole community of New Orleans was never waiting to be rescued or recognized or included. It was already whole. It had been whole for a very long time. The port was where the Borées arrived. The neighborhood, first Carrollton, then the Seventh Ward, was where they lived. And in the difference between those two things, between arrival and habitation, between motion and rootedness, between the international port that made Borée's career possible and the suburban quiet that made his family's survival probable, lies the entire story this book undertakes to tell.

Notes

1. Superior Third District Court, State of Louisiana ex rel. A.P. Field and Vassier, E., vs. Anatole Borée. The New Orleans Bulletin, July 9, 1874, Library of Congress.

2. The New Orleans Bulletin, July 9, 1874, Library of Congress.

3. Passenger manifest documenting the Borée family's arrival from Haiti to New Orleans, nineteenth century. See Figure 4.

4. Freedmen's Bureau record identifying Anatole L. Borée and family, August 1867. National Archives.

5. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105; Louisiana Voter Registration Records, 1867. Entry for Anatole L. Borée, August 5, 1867, Carrollton, Louisiana.

6. New Orleans City Directory, 1874, listing for Josephine Borée and Marie L. Borée, 362 Burgundy Street.

Chapter 2

Power and Precarity: Politics in Reconstruction New Orleans

I. A City Between Two Worlds

To govern New Orleans in the years following the Civil War was to inhabit a city suspended between competing realities. The war had shattered the antebellum order with a force that left no institution untouched and no hierarchy unquestioned. Yet what emerged in its aftermath was not a blank slate upon which Reconstruction could inscribe a new social contract. Rather, it was a city dense with memory of power once held, of structures once secure, and of a social order many among the white political class were determined to restore.

Into this volatile landscape stepped a generation of Black and Creole men who understood both the magnitude and the fragility of the moment before them. Reconstruction opened doors that had long been sealed. Black men voted, held office, and participated in the governance of one of the most commercially vital cities in the United States. These developments were not symbolic. They were substantive, visible, and, for a brief period, transformative.

They were also precarious.

The year 1874 marked the crisis point of this precarity. In September, the White League—an armed paramilitary organization dedicated to overthrowing Republican rule—would launch an open insurrection, defeating the integrated Metropolitan Police in the Battle of Liberty Place and temporarily seizing control of the state government. The violence of that autumn had been building throughout the year, as the Democratic establishment, having failed to win at the ballot box, turned increasingly to intimidation, fraud, and armed force. Anatole Louis Borée's removal from office in July 1874 occurred within this gathering storm—not as an isolated bureaucratic maneuver but as one displacement among many, as the political order that had made his appointment possible began to collapse under coordinated assault.

Borée's appointment as Inspector of Weights and Measures for the Third District had placed him within the working architecture of municipal governance. The Third District was Carrollton, the streetcar suburb where he had established his household, his business, and his voter registration in 1867. It was not abstract administrative space; it was his neighborhood, the Creole residential enclave where his authority as inspector would have been visible to neighbors, kin, and fellow parishioners who relied on the integrity of commercial measurement for their own transactions. His appointment reflected both his qualifications and his standing within this specific, grounded community—a community that would endure even as the political structures that recognized his leadership crumbled.

His position was not ceremonial. It was embedded in the daily regulation of commerce in a port city whose economic life depended on the measurement, exchange, and movement of goods. Every cotton bale, every sugar hogshead, every barrel of molasses that passed through the Third District was measured according to standards he enforced. His literacy and numeracy—demonstrated by his signature in 1867—were instruments of state authority that he exercised within walking distance of his home.
It also placed him within a political system that would prove incapable of sustaining his tenure.

II. The Architecture of Reconstruction Power

The instability that shaped Borée's experience was not incidental. It was structural, produced by the interaction of three overlapping and frequently incompatible systems of authority: federal, state, and local.

At the federal level, Reconstruction was grounded in constitutional transformation. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, together with the Enforcement Acts of 1870–1871, established the legal basis for Black citizenship and political participation. These measures were backed, at least initially, by federal troops and administrative oversight. General Philip Sheridan, commanding the Military

District of Louisiana in 1867, had implemented the registration that recorded Borée as voter and property-holder. Yet federal authority, while expansive in theory, was uneven in application and increasingly constrained by political fatigue and shifting national priorities. By 1874, President Ulysses S. Grant's administration, beset by economic depression and scandal, was retreating from aggressive protection of Black officeholders.

At the state level, governance was defined by instability within the Republican coalition. This coalition—composed of white Unionists, northern transplants (scorned as "carpetbaggers" by their enemies), and Black and Creole political actors—was less a unified party than a collection of competing interests. Henry Clay Warmoth, the young Illinois-born governor who had initially advanced Creole political participation, was by 1874 a spent force, his factional struggles with P.B.S. Pinchback having fractured the party's base. Patronage functioned as the central organizing mechanism of this system. Offices were distributed not solely based on merit or experience, but through networks of allegiance that were fluid, contingent, and subject to rapid realignment.

Borée's connection to Pinchback—the man who had risen from state senator to lieutenant governor to acting governor, the first African American to hold gubernatorial office in the United States—deserves particular attention. Pinchback's political career demonstrated what an expanded franchise made possible, and also the factionalism and instability that defined that era's politics. By 1874, Pinchback's influence was waning; his own political career would effectively end with the collapse of Republican governance. Whether Borée's removal was directly connected to Pinchback's fall cannot be definitively established from surviving records. But the timing suggests correlation if not causation: as Pinchback's faction lost ground to Warmoth's rivals and the Democratic opposition, men appointed through his networks became expendable.

At the local level, these dynamics were intensified by organized resistance from the white Democratic establishment. The White League, founded in 1874, represented the culmination of this resistance—armed, organized, and explicitly dedicated to "redeeming" Louisiana from Republican and Black rule. This resistance operated across a spectrum that included legal obstruction, administrative interference, and, increasingly, open violence. It did not seek merely to contest Reconstruction governance

but to undermine its legitimacy entirely.

These three forces did not act independently. They interacted in ways that produced a political environment in which authority was granted, contested, and withdrawn with remarkable speed. Within such a system, officeholding was never secure. It was conditional, dependent not on the stability of law but on the shifting balance of power.

III. Patronage and the Illusion of Stability

Within this framework, the municipal office functioned as both an opportunity and a vulnerability. The authority conferred by appointment was real. It carried responsibility, visibility, and, for Black and Creole officeholders, a measure of recognition within both their communities and the broader civic structure.

Yet the security of that authority was illusory.

Appointments were embedded within patronage networks that could be reconfigured with little warning. A change in factional alignment at the state or municipal level could render an officeholder expendable, regardless of competence or reputation. The same system that elevated a man to public office could, with equal efficiency, remove him.

Borée's tenure must be understood within this context. His position as Inspector of Weights and Measures was not lost because of personal failure or professional inadequacy. It was lost because the political arrangement that had sustained his appointment shifted in a direction that no longer required his presence.

The local impact of this removal extended beyond Borée himself. In Carrollton, where he had conducted business since 1867, his authority as inspector had been visible and trusted. The accuracy of weights and measures was not an abstract regulatory concern; it was a daily necessity for merchants, consumers, and the commercial

networks that sustained the suburb's Creole community. His displacement disrupted these relationships—not permanently, for the community endured, but significantly enough to demonstrate how political precarity ramified through the social fabric.

IV. The Court as Instrument

The mechanism of Borée's removal reveals the role of the legal system within this political order. A contemporary newspaper account published in The New Orleans Bulletin, a Republican-aligned paper, on July 9, 1874, documents the case:

State of Louisiana ex rel. A. P. Field and Eugene Vassier vs. Anatole Borée—This suit is entered to compel the defendant to vacate the office of inspector of weights and measures of the Third District of the city of New Orleans, an office to which said Vassier had been appointed and commissioned.

The language is precise and procedural. It frames the dispute as a matter of lawful occupancy, a question to be resolved through the orderly processes of the court. Yet beneath this formal structure lies a more complex reality.

The case represents a form of procedural dispossession—a process by which political reassignment is accomplished through legal means. The court did not operate outside the political system; it functioned within it. Judicial proceedings provided the mechanism through which patronage-driven decisions could be formalized, legitimized, and enforced.

In this sense, the removal of Borée from office can be understood as a quo warranto challenge—a legal action demanding "by what authority" an individual holds office. Quo warranto proceedings were the standard mechanism for contesting municipal appointments in this period, and they were inherently political instruments. The plaintiff need not prove misconduct by the officeholder; need only assert—supported by the prevailing political alignment—that another individual held a superior claim. The court's role was not to evaluate Borée's performance but to register the shift in power that had already occurred through factional maneuvering.

The result was the same as if force had been used. Borée was compelled to vacate his

office.

The survival of this record in a Republican newspaper is itself significant. The Bulletin reported the case without editorial comment, suggesting that even within the coalition that had supported Borée's appointment, his removal was not regarded as scandalous—merely as routine patronage adjustment. This normalization of displacement, rendered in dry procedural language, captures the banality of precarity within Reconstruction governance.

V. Recognition and Its Limits

Contemporary accounts described Borée as a "respectable colored man," a phrase that reveals as much about the society that produced it as it does about the man it describes. The designation of "respectable" signals acknowledgment of character, conduct, and standing. It reflects a recognition that Borée met the standards of behavior valued within civic life.

Yet this recognition was bounded by the qualifier "colored," which situated that respectability within a racial hierarchy that remained intact despite the formal changes of Reconstruction.

The phrase thus operates as a form of conditional validation. It acknowledges worth while simultaneously delimiting it. It affirms Borée's standing without granting him equality.

This tension underscores a broader reality: that social recognition within Reconstruction New Orleans was mediated by racialized expectations that no amount of individual achievement could fully transcend. Borée's education, his commercial success, his municipal office—all were visible markers of respectability that the Bulletin could acknowledge. None could erase the "colored" that qualified every such acknowledgment, that placed his achievements within a separate category of praise.

VI. Precarity as Structure

It is tempting to interpret Borée's removal from office as a moment of rupture—a fall from stability into uncertainty. Such a framing, however, obscures the structural nature of his experience.

The instability he encountered was not an aberration. It was a defining feature of the political system in which he operated.

Reconstruction extended formal rights while embedding those rights within institutions that remained susceptible to manipulation. Access to the office was granted, but its retention depended upon conditions that were inherently unstable. The system allowed for participation without guaranteeing permanence.

Borée's experience illustrates this dynamic with particular clarity. His appointment was legitimate. His removal was also legitimate, within the terms of the system. The contradiction lies not in the legality of these actions, but in the structure that made both possible—a structure that extended recognition only to render it conditional, that incorporated Black and Creole leadership only to demonstrate its own capacity for withdrawal.

VII. Labor and the Refusal of Erasure

What followed Borée's removal is as significant as the removal itself. He did not disappear from the historical record, nor from the city in which he had lived and worked. Instead, he returned to labor—work that placed him once again within the visible, physical economy of New Orleans.

This return has often been read as a decline in status. Such a reading is incomplete.

To continue working in the public spaces of the city was to assert presence in the face of displacement. It was to refuse the logic that equated political office with personal

worth. In a society that closely monitored the social standing of men of color, the act of returning to visible, honest labor constituted a form of resistance.
It was a declaration that dignity did not reside solely in the offices one held, but in the continuity of one's character and participation in communal life. It was not invisible labor; it was deliberate visibility, a maintenance of place and purpose that the court could not revoke.

VIII. Community as Foundation

The distinction between political fragility and communal durability is central to understanding Borée's experience. The political system that granted him office proved unstable. The community to which he belonged did not.

The Creole community of Carrollton and the Third District was sustained by networks that operated independently of state authority: kinship ties, religious institutions, educational traditions, and cultural practices that had endured across generations and geographies. These structures provided continuity in the face of political disruption.

Within this framework, the loss of office did not constitute a loss of identity. Borée remained a member of a community that recognized his standing, irrespective of his official position. The streetcar that connected Carrollton to the Vieux Carré continued to run; the parishes where his family worshipped continued to celebrate sacraments; the godparent networks that had bound his daughter Adelaide to her community continued to function. His displacement from municipal office was visible and significant; his displacement from communal life was neither.
This distinction is critical. It shifts the focus from what was lost to what remained—and to the spatial and social specificities that enabled such remaining. Carrollton was not merely a refuge; it was a platform, a base from which Borée could continue to exercise the commercial and cultural competencies that had made him viable as an officeholder in the first place.

IX. Conclusion: Fragility and Persistence

The story of Anatole Louis Borée is not one of simple ascent and decline. It is, rather, an illustration of the conditions under which Black and Creole political life was constituted during Reconstruction.

He held office. That office was taken from him. Both facts are essential. Neither defines the totality of his life.

The political order of Reconstruction New Orleans offered opportunity without stability, recognition without security, participation without permanence. Within that order, Borée's experience was not exceptional. It was representative.
What distinguishes his story is not the loss of position, but the response to it. He remained. He worked. He continued to inhabit the social world of Carrollton that had shaped him, drawing upon the resources of community, culture, and personal dignity that no court could revoke.

In this persistence lies the deeper significance of his life—and the foundation upon which the generations that followed would build: his daughter Adelaide, who married François Perret; their daughter Loretta A. Perret, who would become grandmother to the author of this history. The girl who had crossed the Gulf as Aurore in 1852, who had become Adelaide in the bureaucratic record of 1867, would raise children in the same Carrollton neighborhood where her father had exercised authority and survived its loss. The community that sustained Anatole Borée would sustain them.
This is not nostalgia. This is structure—the structure of Creole durability that outlasted the political order that had both elevated and expelled him. In that durability lies the true measure of Reconstruction's incomplete revolution: not what it granted and withdrew, but what it could not reach, what preceded it and survived it, what remains.

Notes

1. Superior Third District Court, State of Louisiana ex rel. A.P. Field and Vassier, E., vs. Anatole Borée. The New Orleans Bulletin, July 9, 1874, Library of Congress.
2. The New Orleans Bulletin, July 9, 1874, Library of Congress.

3. The New Orleans Bulletin, July 9, 1874, reporting State of Louisiana ex rel. A.P. Field and Eugene Vassier vs. Anatole Borée, Superior Third District Court. Library of Congress.
4. On the White League and the Battle of Liberty Place (September 14, 1874), see James K. Hogue, Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).
5. On P.B.S. Pinchback's career and factional struggles, see John C. Rodrigue, Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862–1880 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).
6. Freedmen's Bureau record, Anatole L. Borée, August 5, 1867, Carrollton, Louisiana. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives.
7. On quo warranto proceedings in Reconstruction-era Louisiana, see Laura F. Edwards, A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Chapter 3

Labor, Dignity, and Survival

I. From the Courtroom to the Levee

There is a particular kind of silence that follows the closing of a door that will not reopen. It is not the silence of defeatthough defeat may be present in it. It is the silence of a man standing at the edge of what was and deciding, without ceremony and without audience, what comes next.

We do not know the precise moment in which Anatole Louis Borée understood that the office was gone and would not be returned to him. The court record is clinical in its language, indifferent to the human weight of what it documents. The legal machinery of Reconstruction in Louisiana ground forward with the same impersonal efficiency, whether it was expanding rights or contracting them. When it rendered its judgment in the matter of State of Louisiana ex rel. A.P. Field and Vassier, E., vs. Anatole Boréereported in July 1874it moved on to the next case without pause.

What Borée did with that judgmenthow he carried it home from the courthouse in the Third District to the household on Burgundy Street, what he said to Josephine, what he understood about what it meant for his daughtersthese things are not recorded.

What is recorded is what he did next.
He went to work.

Not to the municipal offices of the Third District, where the scales and measures of a port city's commerce had been his professional responsibility. Not to the chambers of the Haitian commercial interests he had represented as their agent in New Orleans. He went to the waterfrontto the levee, to the flatboats that moved steadily along the Mississippi carrying coal from the interior to the industries and households of the cityand he applied his body to the work that was available to him.

The Freedmen's Bureau record of August 1867 had already listed his occupation as "laborer," a designation that may reflect either the aftermath of an earlier removal from position or a period of transition in his working life. By the early to mid-1870s, following the court's ruling of 1874, this transition was no longer provisional. It was complete.

What the record confirms, in either case, is that Borée was a man who worked with his hands when his hands were what the moment required, and that he did so without apparent retreat from the community that knew him.

This is not a small thing. It is, in fact, the chapter's central argument.

II. The World at the Water's Edge

To stand on the levee of New Orleans in the years following the Civil War was to stand at the intersection of everything the city was and everything it aspired to be. The Mississippi River, wide and brown and possessed of a current that moved with the unhurried authority of something ancient and indifferent to human arrangement, carried the commerce of a continent past the city's front door. Ships arrived from Liverpool and Le Havre, from Havana and Port-au-Prince, from Mobile and Vera Cruz, their holds packed with the goods of an Atlantic economy that had been built, in no small part, on the labor of the very people who now stood on the levee unloading them.

The waterfront was a place of relentless and coordinated motion. Dockworkers moved in rhythms that had been refined by long practice into something approaching choreographylifting, hauling, stacking, rolling their bodies, performing the physical calculus of weight and balance that kept the port functioning. The air was thick with the mingled smells of the river and the cargo: coal dust and cotton fiber, the sweetness of molasses and the sharp salt of the Gulf, the ever-present humidity of a subtropical city that never entirely dried out. Voices called across the noise of the work in multiple languages: French and English, Spanish, and the Creole patois that blended all threenegotiating, coordinating, cursing, occasionally laughing.

Coal unloading was among the most physically demanding of the dock trades. The flatboats that carried coal down the Mississippi were low and heavy in the water, their

cargo dense and black and resistant to the shovels and baskets that moved it from hold to shore. The work required sustained strength, endurance, and the particular kind of coordination that comes from working alongside the same men day after day until the rhythms of effort become shared and automatic. It was not elegant work. It was essential workthe kind that kept the furnaces of the city's industries burning, that heated the households of its residents through the damp Louisiana winters, that powered the engines of a port economy that ran, ultimately, on the labor of men willing to do what the work required.

Anatole Louis Borée was among those men.

To say this plainly is to risk the misreading that this chapter is written to prevent. The risk is that the reader, shaped by the narrative conventions of rise and fall, will interpret Borée's presence on the levee as evidence of a diminishmenta man reduced, by the vicissitudes of Reconstruction politics, from the dignity of public office to the indignity of manual labor. That interpretation is available, and it is wrong. It is wrong not because the transition was without costit was notbut because it misunderstands the cultural framework within which Borée's life was lived and within which his choices carried meaning.

III. The Moral Economy of Labor

Within the Creole community of New Orleans, dignity was not a fixed attribute conferred by title or position. It was a practicesomething demonstrated through conduct, sustained through character, and recognized by a community whose standards of evaluation had been developed over generations of navigating a world that offered them, at best, conditional and revocable versions of the respect it extended freely to others.

The Inspector of Weights and Measures had been a respectable colored man. The coal unloader on the levee was the same respectable man. The office had changed. The man had not.

This understandingthat dignity inheres in character rather than positionwas not merely a consoling philosophy adopted in the face of adversity. It was practical wisdom forged by long experience of a society in which the formal markers of status available to men of color were always subject to challenge and revocation. A Creole man who tied his sense of worth entirely to an appointed office was a man perpetually at the mercy of the political winds that had given him that office and could take it away with equal speed. A Creole man who understood his worth as located in something more durablein his reputation for honesty, his capacity for work, his faithfulness to family and communitywas a man whose foundation could not be undermined by a court order.

Contemporary accounts of Borée in this period do not describe him with pity. They describe him with the same wordrespectablethat had characterized him in his official capacity. The community's assessment of him did not change when his title did. This is significant historical evidence, and it should be read as such. It tells us not only about Borée but about the community that rendered the judgment: a community whose criteria for respect were robust enough to survive the loss of political position, whose understanding of a man's worth was not mediated by the approval of the institutions that had briefly elevated and then discarded him.

Le travail nourrit l'hommework sustains the man. This was not merely a proverb in the Creole household. It was a lived philosophy, enacted daily in the labor of men and women who understood that the work of sustaining a family and a community was honorable precisely because it was necessary, and that necessity, embraced with dignity, became its own form of grace.

IV. Women, Work, and the Community of Care

To speak of labor in the Creole community of nineteenth-century New Orleans is to speak not only of the men on the levee but of the women in the kitchens, the sewing rooms, the market stalls, and the parlors where the real work of sustaining community was performed. The labor of Creole women was not secondary to the labor of Creole

men. It was, in many respects, the infrastructure upon which everything else rested.
The women worked together. This is the essential fact, and it cannot be overstated. Cooking was not a solitary act but a collective onewomen moving between each other's kitchens with the ease of people who understood that a pot of gombo made for one household could feed three, that the knowledge of how to season a roux properly was a form of cultural inheritance as precious as any sacramental record, and that the act of preparing food together was also the act of maintaining the bonds that held the community intact. Sewing circles were schools of both craft and conversation. The care of children and elderly family members was distributed across the network of women who understood that no household should bear its burdens alone.

The men, equally, labored in community. A bricklayer did not keep his skill to himself. He laid brick for his cousin's house, helped his neighbor repair a gallery, moved furniture from one family member's home to another when circumstance required it. The household repairs, the heavy lifting, the physical work of maintaining the built environment of a communitythese were shared tasks, performed with the same spirit of mutual generosity that animated the women's domestic labor. From food to furniture, jewelry to juice, the Creole family was a community, and the community was a family, and the boundary between one household and the next was permeable in exactly the ways that made survival not merely possible but abundant.

This was the world into which Borée returned when the courthouse door closed behind him. Not a world of isolation and diminishment, but a world of mutual labor and shared sustenance that had been waiting for him, that had never stopped being his, that required of him only that he show up and contribute what he had to give. The coal he unloaded fed furnaces that heated the homes of people who were, in some cases, his neighbors, his parishioners, his cousins by blood or by godparentage. His labor was not abstract. It was local, visible, and embedded in the same networks of community obligation that had always defined his life.

He showed up. He contributed. He endured.

V. The Freedmen's Bureau and the Documentary Record of Survival

The Freedmen's Bureau record of August 1867 that places Anatole L. Borée and his family within the federal documentation of the postbellum South is a document that rewards careful attention. Created by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Landsthe federal agency established in 1865 to oversee the transition from slavery to freedomthe record captures a specific moment in the life of a family navigating an environment of profound uncertainty.

The record lists Borée's occupation as laborer, his residence in New Orleans, and the composition of his family: Josephine Borée, and their children Marie, Anna, and Adelaide. It is a spare document, as such records tend to bea bureaucratic snapshot rather than a portraitbut its sparseness is itself informative. It places Borée within the population that the Freedmen's Bureau was charged with supporting and monitoring, a designation that reflects both his legal status as a free man of color in the post-emancipation South and the economic precarity that characterized even the most educated and resourceful members of that community in the years immediately following the war.

What the record does not capturewhat no bureaucratic document could captureis the texture of the life being lived within those spare categories. It does not record the languages spoken at the Borée table, or the parish at which the family received the sacraments, or the names of the godparents who had bound themselves to the family's children through the rites of Catholic baptism. It does not record Josephine's domestic labor or Marie's emerging intellectual gifts or Adelaide's eventual journey to the Cane River country. It records an occupation and an address, and it moves on.

But taken together with the newspaper accounts that describe Borée as respectable, the city directory records that document his widow's household and his daughter's professional life, the passenger manifest that places the family arriving from Haiti, and the court records that document the legal contest over his office, the Freedmen's Bureau record helps to complete a portrait of a man in motionnot falling,

but moving, adapting, finding in each altered circumstance a new form of the same essential commitment to presence, to provision, and to the community that claimed him and that he claimed in return.

VI. Reframing the Narrative: Resilience as Historical Argument

The reframing of Borée's transition from public office to manual laborfrom the language of decline to the language of resilienceis not merely a sympathetic gesture toward a man who deserves better than the narrative conventions of failure. It is a historical argument, and it needs to be understood as such.

The narrative of declinein which a Black or Creole man's removal from political office represents the end of his meaningful participation in public lifeis itself a product of the same ideological framework that made Reconstruction's reversal possible. It accepts the premise that the only forms of participation that matter are those that the dominant political order recognizes and confers. It measures a man's worth by his proximity to formal power, and it interprets his distance from that power as diminishment. It is, in other words, the story that those who removed Borée from his office would have wanted told about hima story in which their action was decisive, final, and complete.

The evidence does not support that story. What the evidence supports is a different narrative: one in which Borée's removal from office was a significant event in a life that continued, with undiminished purpose and undiminished community standing, beyond that event. The docks were not the end of the story. They were a chapter in ita chapter in which a man demonstrated, through the daily practice of honest labor and continued community presence, that his worth had never been located in the title that had been taken from him.

He did not retreat. He recalibrated. And in that recalibrationin the willingness to show up at the levee with the same dignity he had brought to the municipal offices of the Third Districtlies a truth about Creole resilience that this book is committed to telling.

The political order of Reconstruction Louisiana had the power to remove a man from his office. It did not have the power to remove him from his community, his family, his faith, or his sense of himself as a man whose life had meaning and whose presence mattered. Those things were held in a different kind of trustnot by the courts or the patronage networks of a factional political system, but by the parrans and nannans, the women sewing together and the men laying brick for one another, the entire dense and durable network of mutual care and shared labor that was, and has always been, the true foundation of Creole life in New Orleans.

The community held. And Borée, within it, held too.

VII. A Rest, But Not a Resignation

There is a phrase that moves through the descendants of Anatole Louis Borée like a river through familiar countryquiet, persistent, shaping the landscape through which it passes without announcing itself as anything other than what it is. It is not a motto or a maxim. It is a disposition, inherited rather than taught, recognized rather than learned: the instinct to rest but never quit.

To rest is not to surrender. It is to acknowledge the weight of what has been carried and to set it down, briefly, not because the journey is over but because the body and the spirit require what the Creole tradition has always understood as necessary: a moment of stillness before the next movement forward.

Borée rested. He rested from the particular form of public service that the political order had decided he was no longer permitted to perform. And then he did not quit. He went to the docks. He unloaded coal. He maintained his presence in the community that knew him. He provided for his family. He endured.

What followed his time on the leveethe death that would leave Josephine to lead the household alone, the daughter who would stand in front of a classroom and insist on

the intellectual life of her community, the children who would carry the family name into new geographies and new generationsall of this was made possible by the decision, taken in the silence after the courthouse door closed, to continue.

It was not a dramatic decision. It left no monument. It generated no newspaper account beyond the quiet confirmation, in the description of a "respectable colored man," that the community's assessment of Anatole Louis Borée had not changed when his circumstances did.

But it was, in its own way, the most consequential decision of his life. Because it meant that the story continued. And the story, continuing, produced everything that followed.

Notes

1. The New Orleans Bulletin, July 9, 1874, reporting State of Louisiana ex rel. A.P. Field and Eugene Vassier vs. Anatole Borée, Superior Third District Court. Library of Congress.
2. Freedmen's Bureau record identifying Anatole L. Borée and family, August 1867. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives. See Figure 3.
3. On the moral economy of labor among free people of color, see Tera W. Hunter, To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
4. On Creole community structure and mutual aid, see Kimberly S. Hanger, Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

Chapter 4

Women Who Carried the Legacy

I. The Women the Record Almost Missed

If Chapter 3 traced how a man remained within his community after the loss of public office, this chapter turns to the women who ensured that there was still a community to return to. This chapter argues that the survival of the Borée familyand, more broadly, the continuity of Creole life in postbellum New Orleanswas not secured in the courtroom or on the levee, but in the labor, leadership, and intellectual life of its women.

History has a particular way of rendering women invisible. Not through malice, always, but through the quiet assumption embedded in the documentary practices of the nineteenth century that the lives most worth recording were the lives most visible in public in courtrooms, in newspaper accounts, in city directories listed under a man's name and occupation. Women appeared in these records at the margins: as wives, as widows, as the unnamed mothers of children whose baptisms were registered in parish ledgers that noted the father's name first and the mother's second, if at all. They appeared when property changed hands, when they married, when they died. Between those moments, the record frequently fell silent.

Yet the women did not fall silent. They cooked and sewed and taught and prayed. They led households, raised children, and maintained the cultural practices that held communities together across generations of political upheaval and economic uncertainty. They carried, in their persons and in their daily labor, the accumulated wisdom of communities that had learned to locate their most essential resources not in the public institutions that could be taken away but in the domestic and spiritual life that could not. They were, in the fullest sense, the keepers of what mattered.

In the Creole community of New Orleans, this truth was not merely acknowledged. It was embedded in the social architecture of the community itself. The nannan, the godmother, was not a ceremonial figure. She was a woman with real

obligations and real authority, bound by the sacrament of baptism to the spiritual and material welfare of her godchild in ways that the community took seriously and enforced through the pressure of social expectation. The woman who led the rosary group was not performing a domestic role, in contrast to the public roles of men. She was performing a function of community leadership that the parish recognized and the neighborhood depended upon. The teacher who stood in front of a classroom of Black and Creole children in Reconstruction New Orleans was not occupying a lesser sphere than the politician who held office downtown. She was doing work that would outlast any political appointmentwork whose effects would be measured not in years but in generations.

To understand the women of the Borée family, one must first understand this worlda world in which female authority was real, varied in its forms, and essential to the survival of everything the community valued.

II. Widowhood and the Economy of Survival

The death of Anatole Louis Borée, confirmed by the 1874 city directory entry that lists his widow, Josephine Borée, as the resident of 362 Burgundy Street, placed a woman of color in one of the most economically precarious positions available in Reconstruction-era New Orleans. Widowhood was, for women of any background in the nineteenth century, a condition that tested the resources of character and community to their limits. For women of color, those tests were compounded by the additional weight of racial constraint by a legal and economic system that offered them fewer protections, fewer options, and fewer paths to financial stability than it offered to white women in comparable circumstances.

Josephine Borée's widowhood must be understood within a gendered political economy of Reconstruction, in which women's laboroften unrecorded and undervaluedfunctioned as the stabilizing force within households navigating economic and legal precarity.

The economic reality of widowhood for free women of color in postbellum New Orleans was shaped by several intersecting forces. Property rights, while more robust in

Louisiana's civil law tradition than in the common law systems of other states, were nonetheless subject to challenge and erosion in an environment of political instability and racial pressure. Employment options for women of color, however educated and however capable, were circumscribed by the same racial hierarchies that had governed the antebellum period and that Reconstruction had modified but not dissolved. The domestic economy, the management of a household, the feeding, clothing and educating of children, the maintenance of the social relationships that constituted a family's place in the community fell to widows as both responsibility and burden, without the economic infrastructure that a husband's income had provided.

Josephine Borée navigated this terrain with the competence and dignity that the record, however sparse, consistently implies. The city directory entry that documents her household is not merely a bureaucratic notation. It is evidence of a woman who had established and maintained an independent household in a specific location, 362 Burgundy Streetat a time when the economic and social forces arrayed against that independence were considerable. She had not retreated to the household of a male relative, had not dissolved her family into the larger kinship network, had not disappeared from the documentary record into the invisibility that widowhood too often imposed on women of color. She was there, at a named address, heading a named household, with a daughter whose professional employment is recorded alongside her own residence.

This is not a small achievement. It is, in fact, a form of heroism, the quiet, daily, undramatic heroism of a woman who understood that the family's survival depended on her capacity to hold it together, and who held it together. The economic contribution of Marie L. Borée's teaching salary to the household at 362 Burgundy Street cannot be overstated. In a household headed by a widow, the daughter's income was not supplementary. It was structural, one of the primary means by which the family sustained itself in the years following Anatole's death. That Marie was employed as a teacher at St. Andrew Public School reflects both her educational attainment and her family's investment in that attainment, an investment that Josephine had presumably sustained and supported through the difficult years of Reconstruction. The mother's

management of the household made the daughter's education possible. The daughter's education made the household's survival sustainable. The two women's labors were not parallel but interlocking, each depending on the other in ways that the documentary record captures only partially but that the logic of the situation makes fully legible.

The daily life of Josephine Borée is not preserved in the archive in the way that the activities of public men were. And yet, her absence from the record does not signify absence from labor. Women in her positionCreole women of color maintaining independent households in postbellum New Orleanswere responsible for a range of essential tasks that sustained both family and community life. These included the preparation of food, often in quantities that extended beyond the immediate household; the production and repair of clothing through sewing; the management of limited financial resources; and the maintenance of social and religious networks that ensured mutual aid in times of need.

Such labor was neither incidental nor secondary. It constituted the economic and cultural foundation upon which households like that of 362 Burgundy Street depended. That these practices continued into subsequent generations of the Borée family suggests not rupture, but continuitya line of knowledge carried not in formal records, but in the hands and habits of the women who lived it.

III. Josephine Lavilotte Borée: The Woman Behind the Name

The designation of “Hayti” on the passenger manifest places Josephine Borée within the broader migration of refugees from Saint-Domingue to New Orleans in the early nineteenth century. While scholarship has demonstrated that a substantial proportion of these migrants were white, the arrival of free people of colormany of whom occupied complex and shifting social positionswas equally significant in shaping the Creole communities of New Orleans. Josephine’s presence within this migration situates her within a transatlantic world marked by upheaval, displacement, and cultural continuity.

The question of Josephine Borée's maiden name is not merely a genealogical puzzle. It is a window into the naming practices of the Creole community and into the

ways in which women's identities were preserved, encoded, and transmitted across generations in a culture that understood the maternal line as a form of heritage as significant as the paternal one.

This chapter reads naming practices as archival evidence, treating the middle initial not as incidental but as intentional cultural inscription.

The recurrence of the middle initial "L." in the names of both Marie L. Borée and Adelaide L. Borée points, with the consistency that Creole naming conventions make meaningful, toward a maternal surname beginning with that letter. The most probable candidates, Lavilotte and Laviolette, are both names documented within the francophone Creole community of Louisiana, names that carry the linguistic markers of French colonial heritage and that appear in the sacramental records of New Orleans parishes in forms that reflect the orthographic variations characteristic of records maintained across French and Spanish administrative periods. The hypothesis that Josephine Borée was born Josephine Lavilotte or Laviolette, the two names being variant spellings of what may have been the same family line, is supported by this naming evidence and awaits confirmation through the sacramental records of St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral, where a marriage record for Anatole Borée and Josephine Lavilotte, if it exists, would provide definitive documentation.

What the naming evidence already tells us, however, is significant. The practice of embedding the mother's surname as a middle name in children was not accidental in Creole families. It was deliberatea form of cultural record-keeping enacted at the level of the individual name, a way of ensuring that the maternal line was not erased by the patrilineal conventions of civil documentation. In a community where women's contributions and women's identities were systematically underrepresented in the official record, the middle initial was a small but persistent act of preservation.

IV. Marie L. Borée: The Educator as Community Servant

The 1874 city directory entry that lists Marie L. Borée as a teacher at St. Andrew Public School places her within one of the most significant social transformations of the

Reconstruction era: the entry of Black and Creole women into the teaching profession as a primary means of community advancement and cultural transmission.

In Reconstruction Louisiana, public education for Black and Creole childrensupported in part by the Freedmen's Bureauwas both a social innovation and a political battleground. Schools were not merely sites of instruction; they were contested spaces in which the meaning of freedom itself was being negotiated.

To be a teacher in Reconstruction New Orleans was to occupy a position that carried weight far beyond its formal job description. The public schools that Reconstruction had established were not merely educational institutions. They were declarations. They were assertions, made in brick and mortar and lesson plans and the daily presence of teachers who believed in the intellectual capacity of their students, that the children of the formerly enslaved and the long-free alike deserved access to the knowledge that the antebellum order had worked to deny them. Every classroom was a form of political argument. Every lesson was a form of resistance.

Marie L. Borée understood this. She could not have been a teacher in Reconstruction New Orleans without understanding it. To stand at the front of that classroom, day after day, was to perform an act of civic courage that the job title of "teacher" does not fully convey.

She was also, in the most immediate sense, a woman doing work that mattered to real children in a real community. The students who passed through her classroom were the children of the Creole and Black families of New Orleans, whose access to education was, in many cases, recent and fragile. What she gave them was not merely literacy and numeracy. It was the experience of being taken seriously by an educator who was herself a member of the community.

V. Gender, Dignity, and Intellectual Life

The intellectual life of Creole women in nineteenth-century New Orleans has been systematically underrepresented in the historical record, and the

underrepresentation is itself a form of historical distortion that this chapter is committed to correcting.

The failure of the archive to record Creole women's intellectual lives is not evidence of absence, but evidence of the archive's limitations.

Creole women read. They discussed. They formed opinions and expressed them in domestic, parish, and educational spaces where their authority was real, even when it was not formally recognized. The intellectual life of the Creole community was not divided into a public male sphere and a private female one. It was a shared endeavor.

Their authority extended deeply into religious life. Women led rosaries, maintained devotional practices, and served as godmothers whose obligations extended beyond ceremony into sustained spiritual and material care. In this sense, faith functioned as a domain of female leadershipone in which women shaped not only belief but community cohesion.

Josephine Borée exemplified this. She was not merely surviving. She was leading.

VI. The Household as Institution

The daily life of Josephine Borée is not preserved in the archive in the way that the activities of public men were. And yet, her absence from the record does not signify absence from labor. Women in her positionCreole women of color maintaining independent households in postbellum New Orleanswere responsible for a range of essential tasks that sustained both family and community life. These included the preparation of food, often in quantities that extended beyond the immediate household; the production and repair of clothing through sewing; the management of limited financial resources; and the maintenance of social and religious networks that ensured mutual aid in times of need.

Such labor was neither incidental nor secondary. It constituted the economic and cultural foundation upon which households like that of 362 Burgundy Street depended. That these practices continued into subsequent generations of the Borée family suggests

not rupture, but continuitya line of knowledge carried not in formal records, but in the hands and habits of the women who lived it.

There is a concept in the history of women and family that proves particularly useful for understanding the Borée household at 362 Burgundy Street: the household as institution.

The household operated not as a private retreat from public life, but as a parallel institutionone that performed functions the formal political order could not sustain for people of color.

Under Josephine's management, it was the base from which Marie pursued her professional career, the anchor of the family's presence, and the space within which faith and culture were transmitted. It was where decisions were made, where children were formed, and where the values that would carry a family through political upheaval were instilled.

Josephine held that house. She held it through grief, through economic uncertainty, and through the dismantling of Reconstruction. She held it quietly, completely, and with authority.

While the documentary record does not preserve the details of Josephine Borée's daily labor, the intergenerational transmission of skills within the family offers important clues. Her descendant, Adelaide Borée, is documented as a seamstress and cookskills she in turn passed to the next generation. Within Creole households, such knowledge was rarely acquired in isolation; it was taught, practiced, and refined across generations of women. It is therefore likely that Josephine participated in, and contributed to, this continuum of domestic and economic expertise.

VII. Conclusion: Finding Her, Finding Everything

The difficulty of reconstructing Josephine Borée's life is not unique to her. It reflects a broader archival pattern in which the lives of women of color were documented only intermittently, if at all. To write her history, therefore, is not simply to

recover an individual, but to confront the limits of the historical record itselfand to insist that what was not recorded still mattered, still functioned, and still shaped the generations that followed.

To recover Josephine Borée is not simply to add a woman back into the record. It is to recognize that sheand women like her were the reason there is a record at all.

That name. That address. They are enough to find her. And finding her, we find everything.

Notes

1. New Orleans City Directory, 1874, listing for Josephine Borée and Marie L. Borée, 362 Burgundy Street.

2. Archdiocese of New Orleans, sacramental records, St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral. The hypothesis of Josephine Lavilotte is supported by the recurrence of the middle initial "L." in the names of Marie L. Borée and Adelaide L. Borée, consistent with Creole naming conventions preserving the maternal surname.

3. New Orleans City Directory, 1874, listing for Marie L. Borée, teacher, St. Andrew Public School.

Chapter 5

Faith, Family, and Naming: Reconstructing a Creole Household

I. The Archive That Outlasted the State

There is a particular irony embedded in the history of documentation in Louisiana. The state that produced some of the most elaborate civil record-keeping in the antebellum South — the notarial archives, the succession records, the property conveyances that tracked the movement of land and people and wealth through the French and Spanish and American legal systems — also produced, in the years of Reconstruction and its aftermath, some of the most significant gaps in the documentary record of Black and Creole family life. Political upheaval disrupted civil registration. Racial violence destroyed records along with the communities that had generated them. The systematic exclusion of Black and Creole families from the protections of the legal system meant that the documents most useful for reconstructing their lives were precisely the documents least likely to have been carefully maintained or preserved.

And yet the Catholic Church kept its records.

The sacramental registers of the parishes of New Orleans — St. Louis Cathedral, St. Augustine Catholic Church, Corpus Christi, Saint Rose de Lima, St. Leo the Great, and the others that anchored the Creole neighborhoods of the city — survived the disruptions that claimed so much else. They survived because they were maintained by an institution whose commitment to record-keeping predated the American republic and whose organizational continuity was not subject to the electoral cycles and factional contests that destabilized civil governance. They survived because the priests who maintained them understood that a baptismal record was not merely an administrative document but a theological one — evidence of a soul's entry into the community of the faithful, a record that the Church had an obligation to preserve as carefully as any other sacred thing.

For the genealogical historian working to reconstruct the lives of Creole families of color in nineteenth-century Louisiana, these registers are not supplementary sources. They are primary archives — often the only archives — through which the full texture of a family's history can be recovered. They contain what the civil record omits: the mother's name alongside the father's, the godparents who bound themselves to the child's spiritual formation, the multiple given names that encoded family history and religious devotion in a single act of naming, the kinship networks that extended far beyond the nuclear family into the dense web of obligation and affection that the community called la famille élargie — the extended family.

To read a sacramental register is to read a community. And to read the sacramental registers of the parishes with which the Borée family was affiliated is to read, in the most intimate possible terms, the architecture of a family that held itself together across generations through precisely the instruments of faith and naming and godparentage that those registers preserve.

II. The Parishes That Held the Community

The Catholic parishes of New Orleans were not interchangeable institutions. Each occupied a specific place within the social and geographic landscape of the city, and each served a community whose identity was shaped by the particular history of the neighborhood it anchored. To know which parish a Creole family attended was to know something essential about who they were — their neighborhood, their social networks, their linguistic community, their place within the intricate hierarchy of Creole New Orleans.

St. Louis Cathedral, rising above Jackson Square at the heart of the Vieux Carré, was the oldest and most prestigious Catholic parish in Louisiana — the mother church of the Archdiocese, the site of the city's most significant ceremonial events, and the repository of sacramental records that stretched back to the earliest years of French colonial settlement. To be baptized at St. Louis Cathedral was to be entered into a record that connected the present to the deepest roots of Louisiana's Catholic history. The cathedral served the full range of New Orleans's Catholic population, but for Creole

families of color, it carried a particular significance: it was the church where generations of les gens de couleur libres had received the sacraments, where their marriages had been solemnized and their dead had been prayed over, where the most formal expressions of Catholic identity were enacted and preserved.

St. Augustine Catholic Church, founded in 1841 in the Tremé neighborhood, occupied a different but equally significant place in the Creole Catholic landscape. It was established specifically to serve the free colored Catholic community of New Orleans — a community that had, in some cases, helped finance its construction — and it became one of the most important institutional anchors of Creole identity in the city. Its sacramental records are among the most valuable genealogical sources available for the reconstruction of Creole families of color, preserving the baptisms, marriages, and burials of a community that understood this parish as its own in a way that the cathedral, for all its grandeur, could not entirely be.[1]

Corpus Christi Catholic Church, in the Seventh Ward, represented the continuation of this tradition into the twentieth century — the parish where the Creole community of North Roman Street and its surroundings gathered for the sacraments, where children were baptized into the faith and the family simultaneously, where the confirmation ceremonies that formalized a young person's adult membership in the community of the Church were celebrated with the full attendance of the extended family network. It was here, in the Seventh Ward, that the sacramental life of the Borée family's descendants continued — the same practices, the same faith, the same understanding of the parish as the organizing institution of communal identity, carried forward from St. Louis Cathedral and St. Augustine through the generations to Corpus Christi and beyond.[2]

Saint Rose de Lima and St. Leo the Great extended this geography further, parishes whose names carried, for those who grew up within their reach, the accumulated weight of every family occasion that had been marked within their walls. The sacramental calendar — baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage, last rites — was the rhythm by which Creole family life was organized and publicly

performed, and the parishes were the stages on which that performance occurred, witnessed by the entire community network that the occasion assembled.

III. The Sacramental Record as Genealogical Archive

The Catholic sacramental record is a document of extraordinary richness for the genealogical historian, and its richness lies precisely in what it preserves that civil documentation does not.

A civil birth record, in nineteenth-century Louisiana, typically noted the child's name, the date of birth, the father's name and occupation, and, if the clerk was thorough, the mother's name. A sacramental baptismal record noted all of this — and then went further. It recorded the child's full baptismal name, which frequently included multiple given names encoding both family history and religious devotion. It recorded the godfather's name and, crucially, the godmother's name — the parran and the nannan whose presence at the baptismal font created a bond of spiritual kinship that the community recognized as carrying real obligations and real authority. It recorded the officiating priest, which allows the historian to date the record and situate it within the specific ministry of a particular parish. And it preserved, in the orthographic conventions of the language in which it was recorded — French in the colonial period, increasingly English in the American period, with Spanish variants reflecting the decades of Spanish governance — the linguistic fingerprints of a community's history.

The variant spellings that appear across the Borée family's documentary record are themselves a lesson in how these registers must be read. The family name appears as Borée in some records, Boré in others, and Bore in still others — variations that reflect not inconsistency in the family's identity but the orthographic conventions of different scribes, different languages, and different administrative periods. Marie L. Borée may appear in a sacramental record as Marie Louise Boré. Adelaide may appear as Adélaïde Boré. The historian who searches only for the exact spelling will miss the family entirely. The historian who understands the range of variation and reads across it will find them — in the baptismal registers, in the marriage records, in the burial entries that mark the ends of lives the civil record may have already ceased to follow.[3]

This is the methodology that the reconstruction of the Borée family requires and that this study has employed: a reading across orthographic variation, across linguistic registers, across the gap between the name a family knew itself by and the name a clerk wrote down in a language not always his own or theirs.

IV. The Lavilotte Hypothesis: Naming as Evidence

The most significant genealogical hypothesis that the sacramental record framework makes possible — and that it alone can ultimately confirm or refute — concerns the maiden name of Josephine Borée, the widow of Anatole Louis Borée and the mother of Marie L. and Adelaide L. Borée.

The evidence, as developed in the preceding chapter, begins with the middle initial. Both Marie and Adelaide carry the initial "L." as their middle name, and in the Creole naming tradition, this consistency is not coincidental. It is systematic. The practice of giving children the mother's surname as a middle name — preserving the maternal lineage in the child's formal name in a documentary environment that otherwise privileged the paternal — was a deliberate cultural strategy, enacted at the moment of baptism and preserved in the sacramental record, through which women's family identities were transmitted across generations even when the civil record failed to capture them.

The initial "L." points toward a maternal surname, and the most linguistically consistent candidates within the documented francophone Creole community of Louisiana are Lavilotte and Laviolette. Both names appear in Louisiana sacramental records. Both carry the markers of French colonial heritage — the la prefix, the double consonant, the final e that French orthography preserves and English transcription sometimes drops. Both are consistent with the social world of the free Creole of color community in which Josephine Borée moved and in which her children were raised.

The hypothesis that Josephine was born Josephine Lavilotte — entering the Borée family through her marriage to Anatole and transmitting her own family name forward through the middle initials of her children — awaits the sacramental confirmation that the registers of St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral

may yet provide. A marriage record for Anatole Borée and Josephine Lavilotte, if it survives in those archives, would resolve the question definitively. A baptismal record for Marie Louise Lavilotte Borée or Adelaide Lavilotte Borée would confirm it equally. The search continues. But the hypothesis, grounded in the consistent evidence of the naming convention and the documentary record as it currently stands, is the most probable reconstruction available — and it is the reconstruction that this study advances as its working conclusion pending further archival investigation.[4]

What the hypothesis recovers, regardless of its ultimate confirmation, is the outline of a woman. Josephine Lavilotte, born into the francophone Creole community of Louisiana, raised in the Catholic faith that her name's likely parish affiliations suggest, married to a man of Haitian origin and New Orleans ambition, a mother who embedded her own family name in her children's names as a form of love and as a form of record — this woman existed. The evidence points toward her with the consistency of multiple independent sources converging on the same conclusion. She was there. And the middle initial "L." is her signature, written in her children's names, preserved in the registers of the parishes that kept what the state did not.

V. Godparentage: The Sacramental Network as Social Architecture

Of all the instruments through which the Creole community maintained its coherence across generations, none was more carefully managed or more socially consequential than the institution of godparentage — the parrainage through which the community of the baptized was organized into networks of spiritual kinship that carried real obligations, real authority, and real economic function.

The selection of godparents in a Creole Catholic family was not a casual decision. It was a deliberate act of social architecture — a choice about which relationships the family wished to formalize, strengthen, and bind with the weight of sacramental obligation. The parran and the nannan who stood at the baptismal font became, in the eyes of the Church and in the practice of the community, co-parents of the child — responsible for the child's spiritual formation, obligated to provide material support in

the event of the parents' death or incapacity, and connected to the child's family by a bond that the community treated as equivalent in many respects to blood kinship.

Within the Creole community, this institution served functions that extended far beyond the spiritual. Godparent relationships were, simultaneously, economic alliances — connections between families that created networks of mutual obligation and mutual support, that facilitated the sharing of resources and the consolidation of social capital in a community where formal economic institutions were often inaccessible or hostile. To choose as godparents the members of another Creole family was to create a relationship of obligation between the two families that would be honored across generations. To choose as godparents one's own cousins or the children of one's own godparents was to strengthen the existing networks of kinship and to ensure that the community's most intimate resources — its knowledge, its property, its social connections — remained within the circle of those who shared its values and its history.

This is why godparents in Creole families were so frequently chosen from within the family itself — from cousins, from the children of siblings, from the extended kinship network that the community maintained with such care. It was not insularity for its own sake. It was the rational management of social and economic resources by a community that understood, from long experience, that the most reliable forms of support were those grounded in the deepest forms of obligation. A godparent who was also a cousin was a godparent whose commitment was reinforced by blood as well as by sacrament — a doubling of the bond that the community recognized and valued. And critically, godparents chosen from within the family ensured that in the event of a parent's death or incapacity, the rearing of the children would remain within the traditions, the language, the faith, and the bloodline of the Creole family — passing not merely from parent to guardian but from one keeper of the tradition to another.

The sacramental records that document these relationships are, therefore, not merely lists of names. They are maps of the community's social architecture — diagrams of the networks through which resources, obligations, and identities moved across generations. When the genealogical historian finds, in a baptismal register, the names of the godparents alongside the names of the parents and the child, she is reading not only

a religious record but a social one: evidence of the specific relationships that a family chose to formalize at the most significant moment of a child's entry into the community of the faithful.

VI. The Confirmation Name: Identity Written Twice

If baptism is the ceremony through which a child enters the community of the Church, confirmation is the ceremony through which a young person claims that membership as their own — freely, deliberately, as an act of adult choice rather than infant reception. And in the Creole Catholic tradition, the name chosen at confirmation was not merely a devotional selection. It was a declaration of identity, a statement of belonging, and a form of genealogical record-keeping as deliberate and as meaningful as any entry in a parish register.

The confirmation name in a Creole family was chosen with care and with intention. It honored a saint whose life and virtues the confirmand was committing to emulate. And it honored, simultaneously, someone within the family — a grandmother, a godmother, a beloved cousin, a woman whose name carried the weight of a particular form of Creole womanhood that the family wished to see continued. The name was a bridge: between the individual and the saint, between the confirmand and the family member whose name she took, between the present moment of the confirmation ceremony and the accumulated history of every person who had borne that name before.

The name Veronica is such a name. Saint Veronica — the woman who, according to tradition, wiped the face of Christ on the road to Calvary and found his image miraculously preserved on the cloth — is a saint of compassionate witness, of presence in the moment of suffering, of the courage to offer comfort when comfort is dangerous. She is a saint whose story speaks directly to the experience of a community that had been present at the sufferings of others, that had offered what comfort it could in conditions of constraint, and that had carried forward the image of human dignity even when the world around it seemed determined to erase it.

And in one Creole family of the Seventh Ward, the name Veronica has been carried by a grandmother, and by her granddaughter, and by a first cousin — three

generations of women bearing the same name as a declaration of continuity, as a statement that what the grandmother embodied will be carried forward by those who come after her, as a form of love expressed through the most intimate act of naming available within the Catholic sacramental tradition.[5]

This is what confirmation naming does in a Creole family. It writes identity twice: once in the Church's record, where the name is formally conferred and preserved in the sacramental register, and once in the family's living memory, where the name connects the person who bears it to every person who has borne it before. The two writings reinforce each other — the official and the intimate, the sacramental and the genealogical, the record that the Church keeps and the memory that the family keeps, together constituting a form of identity documentation more durable than any civil certificate.

The Borée family's naming practices — the middle initials that preserved maternal surnames, the baptismal names that encoded family history, the confirmation names that declared continuity with the women who had come before — were not random or sentimental. They were systematic. They were a technology of identity preservation, developed over generations by a community that understood that the official record could not be trusted to remember what mattered, and that therefore took the responsibility of remembering into its own hands, encoding it in the names that its children would carry through their entire lives.

VII. The Church as Keeper of What the State Forgot

The argument of this chapter, stated plainly, is this: for the Creole family of color in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Louisiana, the Catholic Church was the most reliable keeper of identity that existed. Not because the Church was without its own failures and its own complicity in the racial and social hierarchies of the society it served — it was neither without those failures nor innocent of that complicity. But because the records it kept were more complete, more consistent, and more attentive to the full humanity of the people they documented than the civil records that the state maintained.

The civil record noted a man's occupation and his address. The sacramental record noted his children's names and his wife's family and the godparents who had committed themselves to his children's spiritual formation. The civil record fell silent when a family moved or when political upheaval disrupted the apparatus of registration. The sacramental record continued, maintained by an institution whose continuity did not depend on the stability of any particular political order. The civil record, in too many cases, recorded the lives of Black and Creole people only at the moments when those lives intersected with the interests of the state — in taxes, in legal disputes, in the registration of property. The sacramental record recorded them at the moments that mattered most to the people themselves: the beginning of a life, the formation of a family, the end of a life, and all the sacred thresholds in between.

This is why the genealogical historian of Creole Louisiana turns to the parish registers not as a last resort but as a first resource — not because the civil record has failed but because the sacramental record succeeds in ways the civil record was never designed to. It is why the reconstruction of the Borée family depends, at its most essential levels, on the archives of St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral and Corpus Christi and the Archdiocese of Natchitoches — on the records maintained by the institution that understood, perhaps better than the state ever did, that a name is not merely an identifier. It is a history. It is a claim. It is a form of presence that outlasts the person who bears it and that connects the living to the dead in a chain of identity that no political upheaval can entirely sever.

The Borée family trusted the Church with its names. The Church kept them. And through those names — Marie Louise, Adélaïde, Josephine Lavilotte, Veronica carried across three generations of Seventh Ward women — the family can be found, can be known, can be honored as it deserves.

La foi garde ce que le monde oublie. Faith keeps what the world forgets. It always has. And in the sacramental registers of the parishes of New Orleans, it keeps it still.

Notes

1. Archdiocese of New Orleans, sacramental records, St. Augustine Catholic Church. On the founding of St. Augustine and its significance for the free colored Catholic community, see Emily Clark, Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

2. Archdiocese of New Orleans, sacramental records, Corpus Christi Catholic Church; parish records and family lineage data indicating residence on North Roman Street, New Orleans.

3. On orthographic variation in Louisiana sacramental records and its implications for genealogical research, see the documentary collections of the Louisiana Historical Center and the Archdiocese of New Orleans archives.

4. Archdiocese of New Orleans, sacramental records, St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral. The Lavilotte hypothesis is advanced as a working conclusion pending confirmation through marriage and baptismal records not yet located.

5. Family lineage data; sacramental records, Corpus Christi Catholic Church, Seventh Ward, New Orleans.

Chapter 6

From City to Cane River: Migration, Marriage, and the Expansion of a Creole Family

I. The Children of Josephine

When Josephine Borée held her household together at 362 Burgundy Street in the years following Anatole's death, she was not merely surviving. She was sustaining the conditions from which her children's lives would unfold — each in their own direction, each carrying forward a different facet of the family's accumulated identity, each demonstrating in their particular way the resilience and adaptability that the Borée family had made its defining inheritance.

Marie taught. Adelaide beaded and sewed and played the piano. And somewhere within the extended family network — in a generational and relational position that the documentary record has not yet fully resolved — a woman known to her family as Mary married a man named Alec Quetant from the Cane River country of Natchitoches Parish, extending the family's reach into the inland Creole world of northwestern Louisiana in ways that the passenger manifest and the city directory and the Freedmen's Bureau record could not have predicted.

These were not divergent paths leading away from a common origin. They were expansions — the natural growth of a family whose roots were deep enough to support branches reaching in multiple directions simultaneously. To follow each of these threads is to see the Borée family not as a single narrative line moving from point to point but as something more like a living thing: spreading, adapting, putting down new roots in new soil while remaining connected, through faith and naming and the shared practices of Creole community life, to the trunk from which everything grew.

This chapter follows those threads — with particular attention to Adelaide, whose life in New Orleans carried the family's artistic and domestic traditions forward with a grace and a depth that the surviving record, fragmentary as it is, illuminates with unexpected richness.

II. Adelaide Borée Perret: Seamstress, Beader, Musician

Adelaide Borée was the daughter of Josephine and Anatole, the younger sister of Marie, a child of the Tremé and the Vieux Carré, a woman of New Orleans in the fullest and most particular sense of that phrase. She did not migrate to Cane River. She did not seek a new geography for the family's next chapter. She stayed — rooted in the city her parents had arrived in from Haiti, rooted in the Catholic parish life that structured her community's identity, rooted in the skilled domestic and artistic traditions that Creole women had always carried as both livelihood and vocation.

She was a seamstress. She was a beader. And she played the piano.

These three facts, preserved in family memory across the generations that followed her, are not incidental details of a domestic life. They are a portrait — of a woman whose hands were instruments of both beauty and survival, whose artistic gifts expressed the same cultural synthesis that defined the Creole community she inhabited, whose presence in a household brought with it the capacity to create things of lasting value from the materials at hand.

Seamstress work in the Creole community of nineteenth and early twentieth century New Orleans was not merely a domestic skill. It was a trade, a craft, and a form of cultural expression. The women who sewed — who cut patterns, fitted garments, constructed the clothing that Creole families wore for the sacramental occasions that marked their lives — were practitioners of a tradition that blended French and Spanish and African and Caribbean aesthetic sensibilities into something distinctly and irreducibly New Orleanian. A baptismal gown, a confirmation dress, a wedding veil — these were not purchased items in a community that valued the handmade as an expression of care and identity. They were created, by women like Adelaide, with the full investment of skill and attention that the occasion demanded.

Beading was its own distinct art within this tradition. The intricate application of seed beads to fabric — to ecclesiastical garments, to formal dress, to the decorative objects that adorned Creole households and altars — required a patience and a precision

that spoke to a particular relationship between the maker and her work. Beading was slow, exacting, meditative labor, the kind that could not be rushed without being ruined, the kind that produced, in its finished form, objects of such concentrated beauty that their creation was understood as a form of devotion as much as a form of craft. In a community that understood the boundary between the sacred and the beautiful as permeable — that decorated its altars with the same care it brought to its domestic interiors, that dressed its children for baptism with the same attention it brought to the altar cloths of its parishes — Adelaide's beadwork was not separate from her faith. It was an expression of it.

And then there was the piano.

III. The Piano and the Photograph That Katrina Took

Before Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005, the family of Adelaide Borée Perret possessed one of only two known photographs of their ancestor. It showed Adelaide seated before an upright grand piano — composed, present, her posture carrying the particular combination of ease and formality that a photograph of that era required and that a woman of her background and her generation would have understood instinctively. The image documented not merely a person but a world: the world of a Creole household in which a piano was not a luxury but a statement, in which a woman's musical accomplishment was understood as integral to her identity and her family's standing, in which the capacity to sit at an instrument and play was as much a part of what it meant to be Adelaide Borée as her needle or her beads.

The storm took the photograph. It took it along with so much else — the documents and the objects and the material record of lives that had been lived with care and preserved with love, swept away in the water that the levees failed to hold. What Hurricane Katrina did to the families of New Orleans's Black and Creole communities was not merely a natural disaster. It was an archival catastrophe — a destruction of the material evidence of lives that had already been systematically underrepresented in the official record, a loss that compounded centuries of documentation failure with the sudden, irreversible violence of water and wind.

And yet the photograph survives in memory. Adelaide, seated at her piano. The image is gone but the knowledge of it remains, carried forward by the descendants who saw it before the storm and who hold it now in the only archive that Katrina could not reach: the memory of a family that has always understood, at the deepest level, that remembering is a form of resistance.

The piano itself speaks to a dimension of Creole cultural life that the scholarly record has not always fully appreciated. The presence of a piano in a Creole household of color in nineteenth and early twentieth century New Orleans was not incidental. It was deliberate — a marker of educational attainment, of cultural aspiration, of the family's commitment to the artistic and intellectual life that the Creole tradition valued as inseparable from human dignity. Piano instruction was a component of the education that Creole families of means provided for their daughters, an accomplishment that signaled membership in a community that understood refinement as both a personal virtue and a collective statement. That Adelaide played — and played well enough to be photographed at the instrument, well enough for the image to be preserved and treasured across generations — tells us something essential about the household that Josephine had built and the woman that household had produced.

La musique est la langue que tout le monde comprend. Music is the language everyone understands. In the Creole community of New Orleans, that understanding ran deep — from the African rhythms of Congo Square to the French parlor music of the educated Creole household, from the sacred music of the Catholic Mass to the jazz that was already forming in the streets and dance halls of the city. Adelaide's piano was not separate from this world. It was part of it — a domestic expression of a community's musical identity, played in a household where the line between the sacred and the beautiful had never been entirely distinct.

IV. François Perret: A Frenchman in the Creole World

Adelaide Borée married François Perret — known to the family as a Frenchman, a detail that her daughter Loretta preserved in her own memory and passed forward to the generations that followed. The Perret name is documented within the Creole

communities of Louisiana, appearing in both the New Orleans records and the Natchitoches Parish sacramental registers that connect the Cane River Creole world to the broader francophone Catholic culture of the state.[1] Whether François Perret was a recent arrival from France or a Louisiana-born man of French heritage — français de souche, as the community might have described him — the family memory is consistent: he was a Frenchman, and his marriage to Adelaide brought the European French thread of the Creole synthesis into direct familial contact with the Haitian and Louisiana Creole threads that Adelaide herself embodied.

The family memory also preserves the suggestion that François may have been married previously — a detail that, if confirmed through civil or sacramental records, would add another layer of complexity to his portrait and to the circumstances of his marriage to Adelaide. Second marriages were not uncommon in a community where the mortality rates of the nineteenth century meant that widowhood and remarriage were ordinary features of adult life, and the Catholic Church's sacramental framework provided the legal and spiritual structure within which such transitions were managed. What the family memory preserves of this detail is characteristically honest: not a concealment, not an elaboration, but a transmission of what was known alongside an acknowledgment of what was uncertain.

Adelaide and François also lost a son — a brother to Loretta who lived only two short years. That loss, brief and irreversible, belongs to the full account of this family's life: not as tragedy to be dwelt upon, but as the kind of ordinary grief that nineteenth and early twentieth century families carried as part of the texture of existence, the kind that the Catholic rituals of burial and prayer were designed to hold and to release. A child buried. A name perhaps recorded in a parish register. A grief absorbed into the family's continuing life.

Their daughter — Loretta Adelaide Perret — was named for her mother, the middle name Adelaide carried forward as both tribute and continuation, the Creole naming practice asserting itself once again in the most immediate and intimate way available: a daughter bearing her mother's name as her own.

The family settled in the Tremé — that oldest and most culturally generative of New Orleans's Creole neighborhoods, the place where les gens de couleur libres had put down their deepest institutional roots and where the musical and cultural traditions of Black New Orleans had their most concentrated expression. To raise Loretta in the Tremé was to raise her in the community that had shaped everything the Borée family had become since their arrival from Haiti — the neighborhood of St. Augustine Catholic Church, of Congo Square's legacy, of the benevolent societies and the school networks and the dense kinship webs that made the Tremé not merely a place to live but a world to inhabit.

V. The Mary-Quetant Question: Oral Memory and the Limits of the Archive

Within the family's oral tradition, preserved in the memory of Loretta Adelaide Perret and passed forward to the generations she raised, there is a figure known as Great Auntie Mary — a woman who married a man named Alec Quetant from the Cane River country of Natchitoches Parish, and through whom the family's connections to the inland Creole world of northwestern Louisiana were established or reinforced.

The identity of this Great Auntie Mary — her generational position within the family, her relationship to Josephine and Anatole and their children — remains an open question, and this study advances no definitive answer where none is currently available. What can be said is this: the name Mary, in a Creole family of French and Spanish Catholic heritage, is not a distinct name from Marie or María. It is the same name in three linguistic registers — the English form of the same given name that appears as Marie in French baptismal records and as María in Spanish sacramental registers. The Marie L. Borée who appears in the 1874 city directory as a teacher at St. Andrew Public School may, in a later period of her life, have been known within the family's English-speaking register simply as Mary. Or Great Auntie Mary may represent a separate family member — a cousin, a niece, a woman of the extended Borée kinship network whose relationship to the direct line of Josephine and Anatole was close enough to earn the honorific of auntie but whose precise genealogical position has not yet been recovered from the documentary record.[2]

The marriage certificate of Mary and Alec Quetant, listed in public vital records, is the document that could resolve this question — providing the bride's full name as recorded, her parents' names if listed, her age and residence at the time of the marriage, and the civil or religious authority that performed the ceremony. That document has not yet been obtained for this study, and its retrieval represents the most immediately productive next step in the archival investigation of this family line. Until it is obtained and examined, the question of Great Auntie Mary's identity remains honorably open — a reminder that the work of genealogical history is never finished, that the archive always contains more than has yet been recovered, and that oral memory, carefully preserved across generations, points toward truths that the documents have not yet been asked to confirm.

What the oral memory preserves with certainty is the name: Alec Quetant, from Cane River. That name is specific enough to be searchable in the sacramental records of the Archdiocese of Natchitoches and in the civil records of Natchitoches Parish, where the Cane River Creole community has been documented with considerable thoroughness by the scholars and genealogists who have made that community's history their life's work. The Quetant name, once located in those records, will illuminate not only the identity of the man Great Auntie Mary married but the specific community within the Cane River Creole world into which that marriage brought her — a community with its own deep Catholic roots, its own francophone traditions, and its own intricate networks of kinship and faith that would have recognized and welcomed a woman of Borée heritage as one of their own.[3]

VI. Loretta Adelaide Perret: The Inheritance of Skilled Hands

The daughter of Adelaide and François, Loretta Adelaide Perret was raised in the Tremé with the full inheritance of everything her mother and her grandparents had built and preserved. She carried her mother's name in her own — Loretta Adelaide, the Adelaide preserved as middle name in the Creole tradition of maternal continuity that the family had practiced since Josephine embedded her own initial in her children's names. She carried her mother's skills in her hands. And she carried forward, with a fidelity and a creativity that her own grandchildren would experience directly, the

traditions of communal labor, Catholic faith, and domestic artistry that were the living substance of the Borée family's inheritance.

Loretta was a seamstress — but to call her merely a seamstress is to use too small a word for what she did. She designed. She created her own patterns. She cut and fitted and constructed the garments that marked her family's most sacred occasions — the baptismal gowns, the first communion dresses, the confirmation attire that her grandchildren wore as they received the sacraments that defined their place in the community of the Church and the community of the family. Each garment was a made thing, produced by hands that understood what the occasion required and that brought to its creation the full investment of skill and love that Adelaide had brought to her beadwork and her sewing before her.

She was also a woman of remarkable practical intelligence — a wizard with numbers, as her granddaughter remembers her, able to manage the domestic economy of a family with the precision of someone who had learned, from the women who came before her, that the management of resources was a form of care as real as any other. When the family needed funds for school trips or Church events, Loretta baked. Petit fours from scratch. Cakes that required both skill and patience, produced in a kitchen that was also, in the Creole tradition, a space of community and creativity. She sold them to fund the family's travels — keeping alive, in the most practical and most beautiful way available to her, the tradition of communal labor and mutual support that the Borée family had practiced since the women of Josephine's generation had moved between each other's kitchens on Burgundy Street.

From Adelaide's needle to Loretta's pattern pieces. From Adelaide's piano to Loretta's petit fours. The inheritance was real, and it was specific, and it was passed from mother to daughter to granddaughter with the same deliberateness that the Creole community brought to every form of transmission it valued. The skills changed their form as the generations changed their circumstances. The commitment behind them did not.

VII. What Migration Means in a Rooted Community

The title of this chapter — From City to Cane River — requires, in light of everything the research and the family memory have revealed, a reconsideration of what migration means in the context of a community like the Borée family's.

Migration, in the conventional historical account, is a movement from one place to another — a departure and an arrival, a leaving behind and a taking up. In the macro-level history of the Great Migration, of the movement of Black Americans from the rural South to the urban North, migration is understood as a rupture: a break with one world and an entry into another. That framework, useful as it is for understanding large-scale demographic movements, does not fully capture what happens when a Creole family of New Orleans sends one of its members into the Cane River country through marriage.

The Cane River Creole community of Natchitoches Parish was not a foreign world to a woman of Borée heritage. It was an extension of the same world — the same Catholic faith, the same francophone traditions, the same intricate networks of godparentage and endogamy and communal labor that structured Creole life wherever it took root in Louisiana. A woman who married into that community was not leaving her world behind. She was expanding it — finding, in a new geography, the same essential social architecture that she had known in New Orleans, maintained by people who shared her language and her faith and her understanding of what it meant to be Creole in Louisiana.

This is what the concept of rooted mobility — introduced in the opening chapter and developed across the arc of this book — means in practice. It is not the freedom to move without attachment. It is the capacity to move while remaining attached — to carry the roots with you, to recognize their equivalent in the soil of the new place, to find in the Cane River country the same Catholic parishes and the same naming practices and the same communal traditions that had sustained the family in the Tremé and the Seventh Ward and on Burgundy Street.

Adelaide stayed. Loretta was raised in the Tremé and would eventually find her way to North Roman Street in the Seventh Ward. And somewhere in the family's extended network, Great Auntie Mary went to Cane River and found there what the

Borée family had always known how to find: a community that recognized her, a faith that held her, and a place that was, in the ways that mattered most, already home.

Notes

1. Archdiocese of Natchitoches, sacramental records, St. Augustine Catholic Church, Natchitoches Parish. On the Perret family in the Cane River Creole community, see the genealogical collections of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park and the Northwestern State University of Louisiana archives.

2. The marriage certificate of Mary and Alec Quetant is listed in Louisiana public vital records but has not been obtained for this study. Its retrieval is identified as a priority for future archival investigation. The linguistic equivalence of Marie, Mary, and María across French, English, and Spanish Catholic naming conventions is a standard feature of Creole genealogical research in Louisiana.

3. On the Cane River Creole community and its sacramental records, see Gary B. Mills, The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), the foundational scholarly study of this community.

Chapter 7

North Roman Street

I. Arrival Without Departure

If the preceding chapter traced the expansion of the Borée family outward — into marriage, into new geographies, into the widening branches of a Creole kinship network that reached from the port of New Orleans to the Cane River country of Natchitoches Parish — then Chapter 7 marks something different.

Not a movement outward, but a settling in.

Not departure, but arrival.

And yet, even here, the concept of rooted mobility remains essential. For what the family achieved in the Seventh Ward was not stillness in the conventional sense. It was a form of permanence built out of generations of movement — a rootedness made possible only because the family had learned, across time, how to carry itself forward without losing its center. To arrive at North Roman Street was not to stop moving. It was to recognize, at last, the place where the movement had always been leading.

That place was the Seventh Ward. That street was North Roman. And the household that Henry Joseph Blanchard and Loretta Adelaide Perret Blanchard built there — raising their four children, Barbara, Tyrone, Lyndon, and Nyra Ann, within its walls and on its porch and in the life of the neighborhood that surrounded it — was the fullest expression yet of everything the Borée family's long journey had been building toward.

This is where the story comes home.

II. From Tremé to the Seventh Ward

Loretta Adelaide Perret was raised in the Tremé, in the world her mother Adelaide and her grandmother Josephine had sustained — a world structured by Catholic parish life, skilled domestic labor, and the dense kinship networks that made

neighborhood and family nearly indistinguishable from one another. The Tremé had given her the deepest possible roots: St. Augustine Catholic Church, the benevolent society traditions, the musical and cultural life of the oldest African American neighborhood in the United States. She had been formed there, in the fullest sense — shaped by its streets, its parishes, its people.

The move to the Seventh Ward was not a rupture. It was a continuation — the same Creole world in a different setting, Catholic and francophone in memory and practice, organized through faith and family and education in ways that felt, to those who inhabited them, entirely natural. What changed was not the structure of life but its address. And on North Roman Street, that structure took on a new density — a concentration of family and neighbor and community that transformed a residential block into something closer to a living institution.

Here, the family did not simply reside. It gathered. It named itself. It endured.

III. Loretta: The Inheritance Made Visible

Loretta Adelaide Perret entered adulthood already formed by generations of instruction — much of it unspoken, all of it precise. From her mother, Adelaide Borée Perret, she had inherited the discipline of the hand: the ability to design, to construct, to bring form out of fabric with the patience and precision that craft at the highest level demands. From her grandmother Josephine, she had inherited the discipline of the household: the capacity to hold a family together through organization, care, and the particular kind of endurance that asks nothing of the world and expects nothing except the chance to keep going.

In Loretta, these inheritances did not remain separate. They became practice.

She was a seamstress — but to call her merely a seamstress is to use too small a word. She was a designer of lived memory. The garments she created were not simply clothing. They were sacramental objects — baptismal gowns cut and fitted and stitched by hands that understood what baptism meant, first communion dresses constructed with the precision of someone who knew that the child who wore them was being

dressed for an encounter with the divine, confirmation attire made by a woman who had herself stood at the altar and chosen the name Veronica as a declaration of who she intended to be. Each piece marked a moment in the spiritual and communal life of the family. Each piece was made, not purchased — because in the tradition that Adelaide had transmitted and that Josephine had sustained before her, the handmade was not a lesser thing than the bought. It was a greater one.

Her skill extended beyond the needle. She was a wizard with numbers — possessed of a practical intelligence that allowed her to manage the household economy with the precision of someone who had learned, from the women before her, that the management of resources is a form of care as real as any other. When funds were needed for school trips or Church events, Loretta baked. Petit fours from scratch. Cakes that required patience and precision and time — produced in a kitchen that was, in the Creole tradition, a space of both labor and love, a place where the distinction between provision and devotion had never been entirely clear.

From Adelaide's beadwork and piano to Loretta's patterns and pastries, the inheritance remained intact — transformed in form, constant in purpose. The skills changed as the generations changed their circumstances. The commitment behind them did not.

IV. The Hope Chest and the Proposal

The marriage of Loretta Adelaide Perret to Henry Joseph Blanchard begins, in family memory, with an act that is both intimate and deeply symbolic — the kind of story that a grandmother tells her granddaughter not as anecdote but as inheritance, passing forward the knowledge of how love, in the Creole tradition, was made visible through intention and care.

A hope chest arrived first.

It came from Krauss Department Store on Canal Street — the great department store of New Orleans, the kind of establishment that anchored the commercial life of the city and that a man of serious intention would have chosen as the source of a serious

gift. The chest was filled with sheets and blankets, the foundational materials of a household not yet formed but already imagined. It was not a decorative gesture. It was a structure built in advance — a declaration, delivered in linen and cotton, that a future was being prepared and that the preparation had already begun.

Later that same day, Henry Joseph Blanchard came to call.

He came within the boundaries that the Creole tradition understood and honored: the formal visit, the presence of the family, the supervised but private space of the front porch where intention could be spoken but not yet fully enacted. Loretta's mother permitted them to sit together there — that threshold between the household's interior and the world outside, the space that Creole families had long understood as the appropriate setting for the kind of conversation that would determine a family's future.

And there, with a directness that required no ornament, Henry Joseph Blanchard said what he had come to say.

"Loretta, I am tired of saying Loretta Perret."

She looked at him. She asked him what he wanted to say instead.

"I want to call you Loretta Blanchard."

The hope chest had already spoken. The proposal required only the words to make the intention official. What followed was not simply a marriage but the joining of two expansive Creole family lines — Perret and Blanchard — whose convergence extended the family's reach into new geographies, new kinship networks, and new dimensions of the Louisiana Creole world that the Borée family had inhabited for generations.

V. Blanchard: Lineage and Complexity

Henry Joseph Blanchard came to his marriage to Loretta from a lineage marked by both scale and complexity the kind of family history that Louisiana's layered racial and social landscape produced in abundance, and that the Creole community navigated with the pragmatic intelligence of people who had learned, over generations, that

identity in Louisiana was never simple and that survival required the willingness to move through its complications without losing one's own center.

He was one of fifteen children — twelve of whom survived — born to Eleanora Larche and Joseph Paul Blanchard. The Blanchard family line extended geographically into the Florida Parishes and West Baton Rouge, carrying with it the agricultural and communal traditions of rural Louisiana Creole life that complemented and enriched the urban New Orleans world that Loretta embodied. The Larche line reached further still — back through Louisiana's francophone Creole culture and, through the connection to Gaston Larche, back to France itself, adding yet another thread of European heritage to the already intricate weaving of the family's ancestry.[1]

Within this lineage ran the racial classifications that Louisiana's documentary history had imposed on its mixed-heritage population across centuries: the designation of mulatto in official records, the social practice known as passé blanc — passing for white — that some members of the extended family employed as a strategy of navigation in a society whose racial hierarchies determined access to education, employment, property, and safety. This was not a history of shame. It was a history of survival — the same survival instinct that had moved Anatole Louis Borée from public office to the docks without surrendering his dignity, enacted here in a different register by people who understood that the categories the state imposed on them were instruments of constraint, not definitions of identity.

In his marriage to Loretta, these histories converged — the urban Creole world of the Seventh Ward and the rural Creole world of the Florida Parishes, the Borée-Perret line and the Blanchard-Larche line, the refined domestic traditions of North Roman Street and the expansive kinship networks of a man who had grown up as one of fifteen children and who understood, in his bones, what it meant to belong to something larger than himself.

His mother, Eleonora Larche Blanchard, came to live with Henry and Loretta on North Roman Street and remained there until her death in 1975 — a presence that placed three generations under the same roof and ensured that the transmission of memory, of practice, of the particular knowledge that older women carry, was

continuous and uninterrupted in the household where Barbara, Tyrone, Lyndon, and Nyra Ann were being raised.

VI. North Roman Street and the Romanites

By the time Henry and Loretta had established their life together on North Roman Street, the block had become more than a residential address. It was a community in the fullest sense — families living in proximity not by accident but by design, relatives and extended kin and neighbors whose relationships overlapped and reinforced one another in exactly the ways that the Creole tradition of communal life had always produced.

Children moved between houses. Conversations crossed porches. The boundary between one household and the next softened into a collective rhythm in which the resources of each family were available to all — the food shared, the skills shared, the watching of children shared, the management of difficulty shared in the same spirit of mutual provision that had characterized Creole community life from the women in Josephine's kitchen to the men laying brick for their cousins in the heat of a New Orleans afternoon.

From this environment emerged a name. *The Romanites.*

To call themselves after their street was not convenience. It was a declaration an assertion that place and people were inseparable, that North Roman Street was not simply where they lived but who they were, that the address had become identity in the most complete and most deliberate sense available. The Romanites were not a formal organization with bylaws and officers. They were a community that had named itself, and in naming itself had made visible the thing that the entire arc of the Borée family's history had been building toward: a place claimed, a belonging asserted, a rootedness achieved not despite the family's long history of movement but because of it.

This was rooted mobility realized. After generations of movement — from Haiti to New Orleans, from Burgundy Street to the Tremé to the Seventh Ward, from one form of life to another while carrying the same essential values forward through every

transition — the family and its extended community had arrived at a place where belonging could be named. Where the street itself became the emblem of a world that had been built, house by house and generation by generation, out of endurance and faith and the particular kind of love that expresses itself not in grand gestures but in daily presence.

On North Roman Street, they were home.

VII. The House and Its Life: Memory as Evidence

History, at its most essential, is not made in courtrooms or newspaper offices or the chambers of municipal government. It is made in houses. It is made in the specific, sensory, irreplaceable texture of daily life — in the objects and the games and the rituals and the small repeated gestures through which a family transmits itself from one generation to the next without ceremony or announcement, simply by living.

The house on North Roman Street was such a place.

On Sunday mornings, Henry Joseph Blanchard dressed for Mass at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, where he served as usher — a role that placed him at the threshold of the sacred space, welcoming the community into worship with the same quiet dignity that had characterized the men of this family across the generations. When Mass was finished, the family came home. And on the kitchen table, the Scrabble board came out.

The Sunday Scrabble game was not incidental to the life of the house. It was part of its structure — a weekly gathering around the table that brought together parents and children and grandchildren in the shared labor of language, of thinking, of competing and laughing and arguing over words in a household where words had always mattered. Loretta, whose practical intelligence expressed itself as readily in numbers as in narrative, sat at that table. The children sat. And sometimes a grandchild, not yet five years old, sat on her mother's lap and watched the tiles being placed and understood, without being able to articulate it, that she was being taught something essential about the way this family spent its time.

The house had a claw foot dining room table — the kind of heavy, anchored furniture that announces permanence, that says this household intends to remain. Beneath it, a child could disappear. And Henry Joseph Blanchard, the man who had proposed on a porch with ten words and no ornament, would pretend he could not find her — moving through the rooms with the theatrical bewilderment of a grandfather who has chosen, in this moment, to be entirely at the service of a child's delight. The game required his complicity. He gave it completely.

On the living room floor, he taught pitty-pat — a card game that had traveled, as so much else in the Creole tradition had traveled, from the Caribbean into Louisiana through the circuits of migration and cultural exchange that had brought the Borée family from Haiti to New Orleans generations before. The game was passed down straight from that Caribbean inheritance, played on the floor of a house in the Seventh Ward by a grandfather and his grandchild, the cards moving between their hands as the knowledge of how to play them moved from his generation into hers.

The house had a claw foot tub and, on winter nights, a floor furnace — the kind that radiated heat upward through a grate in the floor, warming the legs of children who stood over it against the damp New Orleans cold. On summer days, the children went outside. The dogs — Butches and Patches — were companions and confidants, and under the house, in the cool shadow beneath the raised foundation that Louisiana's architecture required, a child could lie with them and tell them her dreams in the privacy that only animals and small children fully understand.

Outside, the street was alive. Cousins and neighbors filled the block in the way that North Roman Street had always been filled — with the organized chaos of children at play, stick ball in the street, the sound of voices carrying from porch to porch. And on every porch, someone's momma or grandma or nannan sat watching — the community's oldest and most reliable system of care, the network of women's eyes that had always kept the children of Creole New Orleans safe, held within the communal gaze of a neighborhood that understood its children as belonging to all of them.

Great Grandma Eleonora Larche Blanchard was among those presences — living in the house on North Roman Street, a woman whose lineage connected the family to

the Florida Parishes and to France, whose life in that household until her death in 1975 ensured that the oldest layer of the family's memory remained present and accessible in the daily life of the children being raised around her. She was not a visitor. She was a foundation.

These memories are not sentiment. They are evidence — of the living continuation of exactly the communal domestic life that this book has traced from Josephine's household on Burgundy Street forward through Adelaide's Tremé and into the Seventh Ward. The Sunday Scrabble game after Mass is the continuation of the rosary group's table after prayer. The grandfather on the living room floor teaching pitty-pat is the continuation of the men who laid brick for their cousins and moved furniture between family households and understood provision as a form of love. The nannans on the porches watching the children play are the continuation of every godmother who ever stood at a baptismal font and made a promise she intended to keep.

The house on North Roman Street held all of this. And it gave it, in turn, to the children who grew up inside it.

VIII. The Rosary Group: Faith as Living Practice

Within this community, the rosary group that gathered weekly on North Roman Street was not a peripheral activity. It was the spiritual and social heartbeat of the neighborhood — the practice through which the community's Catholic faith was made visible, embodied, and renewed in the most intimate possible setting: the homes of its members, passed from house to house with the same regularity and the same intention that the family had brought to everything it valued.

The Blessed Mother statue moved through the neighborhood on a weekly circuit — from one household to the next, blessing each home with her presence, gathering around her the women and men and children of the community in the act of common prayer. At the center of each gathering was the rosary itself: the decades of Hail Marys, the Our Fathers, the Mysteries that structured the prayer into a meditation on the life of Christ and the witness of his mother. The prayers were not recited individually but

collectively — voices moving together in the cadence that repeated exposure had transformed into something close to music, the rhythm of the beads beneath the fingers providing a physical counterpart to the spiritual work of the words.

The group possessed a relic — a fragment of the Blessed Mother's garment, preserved under a small cover of plastic — that was passed from hand to hand during the prayers. Each person held it briefly, kissed it, offered through it whatever intention sat most heavily on their heart. Special intentions were named aloud for the sick, for the expectant, for those facing difficulty. Special-specials — that phrase in the soft vowels of New Orleans Creole speech — were brought forward for members whose circumstances were most pressing, the community turning its full collective attention toward one of its own.

And at its center, in every gathering, was a woman on her knees. Moving through the entire rosary with the unhurried certainty of someone for whom this was not a religious obligation but a conversation — direct, intimate, unmediated — with the divine. Not kneeling as performance. Kneeling as devotion. Kneeling as the most honest expression available to a woman who had lived through enough to know that the posture of humility before God was not diminishment but its opposite: the full acknowledgment of what one was and what one needed and what one trusted, without reservation, to be given.

When the prayers were finished, the table was set. Petit fours and finger sandwiches, deviled eggs and punch — the particular menu of a community that knew how to make a gathering feel like a celebration without requiring either wealth or ostentation. The conversation after the rosary was as essential as the rosary itself: the exchange of news, the sharing of need, the laughter that New Orleans has always understood as inseparable from faith, the city's particular gift of finding joy in proximity to difficulty and celebrating life with the full-throated pleasure of people who know exactly how precious it is.

This was the heartbeat of the city made domestic. The rosary and the petit fours. The prayer and the laughter. The kneeling and the table. All of it held together by a community that understood, at the deepest level, that these things are not separate.

IX. Corpus Christi Church and School

At Corpus Christi Catholic Church, the family's continuity became visible across time in the most immediate way available — the way that only sacred spaces inhabited across generations can make visible. Henry served as usher at the door, welcoming the community into worship with the quiet authority of a man who understood his role as both service and statement. The sacraments marked the stages of life: baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage, burial — all occurring within the same walls, witnessed by the same community, recorded in the same registers that had been maintained since the parish's founding.

The school extended that continuity into the secular dimensions of formation. Nyra Ann attended alongside her cousins. Years later, her children would sit in those same classrooms alongside theirs — the next generation occupying the same desks, moving through the same corridors that their parents had moved through before them. This was not coincidence. It was the structural expression of a community's commitment to its own continuity — the deliberate choice, made generation after generation, to educate the family's children in the same institutions, to form them in the same traditions, to ensure that what had been built in one generation would be transmitted to the next with the full weight of lived example behind it.

The name Veronica moved through this world — from grandmother to granddaughter to first cousin — not as coincidence but as practice. A confirmation name chosen because it was already carried by the woman the confirmand most wished to honor, the woman whose faith and endurance and way of moving through the world she was publicly declaring her intention to continue. Written twice: once in the parish register and once in the family's living memory, the two writings reinforcing each other across the years.

X. What Endures: Jewelry, Names, and the Things Katrina Could Not Take

Time, movement, and catastrophe have taken much from this family. Hurricane Katrina, like so many storms before it, disrupted lives and erased material history —

photographs, documents, objects that had served as the tangible record of lives lived with care and preserved with love. The image of Adelaide at her piano. The documents that might have confirmed the Lavilotte hypothesis definitively. The material accumulation of generations, swept away in the water that the levees failed to hold.

And yet not everything was lost.

Jewelry passed down — earrings worn by one woman and gifted to another, the transfer of a small and precious object from one generation to the next carrying with it the memory of the woman who had worn it before, the knowledge of where it had been and what it had witnessed, the particular intimacy of an adornment that had touched another woman's skin. Silverware preserved through moves and storms and the upheavals that test every family's capacity to hold onto what it values. Personal effects carried through time with the deliberateness of people who understood that these objects were not merely decorative but documentary — evidence, held in the hand, of the lives that had preceded and that continued, through the keeping of these things, to be present.

These items are not relics in the ecclesiastical sense — objects removed from ordinary life and placed behind glass. They are continuations. They move. They are worn on birthdays and given at confirmation and brought out for the occasions that the family marks as significant. They are the material form of the same impulse that gives a granddaughter a grandmother's confirmation name — the impulse to keep the past present, to insist that those who came before are not gone but carried, in the most literal possible sense, by the people who come after.

The names, too, endure. Great-great-great-grandchildren of Anatole Louis Borée carry, in their given names, the echo of the people who preceded them — the Maries and the Adelaides and the Lorettas and the Veronicas that mark each generation as belonging to a line that began at the port of New Orleans and has not yet ended. The naming is not nostalgic. It is purposeful. It is the family's most intimate form of historical argument: the claim, renewed at every baptismal font, that continuity is not merely remembered but embodied, not merely honored but lived.

In time, Henry and Loretta would leave North Roman Street purchasing a second home in the Gentilly area of New Orleans, off Elysian Fields Avenue, from the Bennett family of La Ceiba, Honduras, who were the family of Loretta's future son-in-law. That transition belongs to the next chapter of the family's story, and to other hands. But North Roman Street does not disappear when the family moves. It remains in the memories of the children raised there, in the names they carry, in the practices they transmit — as permanent a part of the family's identity as any address in the long geography of the Borée family's journey from port to parish.

XI. Full Circle: From the Port to the Porch

At the beginning of this book, there was a man at the port.

He stepped off a ship from Haiti onto the levee of New Orleans carrying what all people carry across water to a new life: memory, faith, the skills of his hands and the education of his mind, and the particular endurance of someone who has already survived enough to know that survival is not the end of the story but its beginning. He carried with him a wife and children who would become, across the generations that followed, a family of educators and musicians and seamstresses and lawyers and doctors and judges — people whose accomplishments were not despite his example but because of it, built on the foundation of a man who had rested but never quit.

He could not have imagined North Roman Street. He could not have imagined a grandfather pretending he could not find a child hidden under a claw foot dining room table, or a card game carried from the Caribbean being played on a living room floor, or dogs named Butches and Patches keeping company with a child who told them her dreams under the house on a summer afternoon. He could not have imagined the Romanites, or the rosary group, or the Sunday Scrabble game after Mass, or the confirmation gowns sewn by his great-granddaughter's hands, or the petit fours baked to fund a school trip, or the earrings passed from grandmother to granddaughter, or the name Veronica carried across three generations of women as a declaration of who they intended to be.

But he carried the one thing that made all of it possible. *Endurance*.

Not the endurance of the passive; the endurance of someone waiting for circumstances to improve. The endurance of the active: the man who goes to the docks when the office is taken from him, who shows up at the levee with his dignity intact, who provides for his family not because the world has made it easy but because provision is what a man of character does when the world has made it hard. The endurance that his widow Josephine translated into a household held together on Burgundy Street. The endurance that his daughter Marie carried into the classroom. The endurance that his daughter Adelaide expressed in beadwork and music and the image of a woman seated at a piano that her descendants held in their memory long after the photograph itself was gone. The endurance that Loretta received and transmitted, in pattern pieces and petit fours and sacramental gowns and the weekly practice of a faith that kneels before God and rises to set the table.

New Orleans has always known how to do this — how to hold grief and joy in the same hand, how to pray on its knees and celebrate on its feet, how to bury its dead with the solemnity they deserve and then walk behind the brass band playing When the Saints Go Marching In with the full-throated pleasure of a city that understands that life, in all its difficulty and all its beauty, is worth celebrating. The Borée family is a New Orleans family in this deepest sense — not merely geographically but temperamentally, spiritually, in the particular combination of endurance and exuberance that the city has always produced in those who love it well.

The judges and the lawyers and the doctors and the educators who are Anatole Louis Borée's descendants did not arrive at their accomplishments by accident. They arrived there because a man who lost his office went to the docks. Because a woman held a household on Burgundy Street. Because another woman stood in front of a classroom. Because another sat at a piano. Because another sewed a confirmation gown. Because a grandfather taught a card game on a living room floor. Because a rosary group gathered every week and prayed together and laughed together and set the table together and understood, without needing to articulate it, that this — the community, the faith, the table, the shared labor, the porch, the children in the street, the nannans watching — was the thing worth protecting and worth passing forward.

Anatole Louis Borée paved the path. His descendants walk it. And in walking it, they pave it further for the great-great-great-grandchildren who will carry his name, or a name that remembers his, into a future he could not have imagined but that his endurance made possible.

This is the homecoming.

And it was always where the journey was leading.

Notes

1. Parish records and family lineage data indicating the marriage of Loretta A. Perret to Henry Joseph Blanchard; sacramental records from Corpus Christi Catholic Church and St. Augustine Catholic Church. On the Blanchard and Larche family lines in the Florida Parishes and West Baton Rouge, see the genealogical collections of the Louisiana State Archives and the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Conclusion

From Port to Parish

I. The Man at the Port, Revisited

He was, when we first encountered him, a man in motion.

A ship from Haiti. A levee in New Orleans. A city that was, in all the ways that mattered, already his — already speaking his language, already practicing his faith, already organized around the Catholic parish life and the francophone Creole culture that he had carried across the water as part of the irreducible core of who he was. He arrived not as a stranger but as a man coming into his own — into a world that recognized him, into a community that had a place for him, into a city whose particular combination of beauty and danger and possibility was precisely the environment in which a man of his qualities might make something remarkable of himself.

We know what he made.

We know it because the records survived — the court documents and the city directories and the Freedmen's Bureau records and the passenger manifest and the newspaper account that called him, with the condescension of its era and the accuracy of its observation, a respectable colored man. We know it because the sacramental registers of the parishes he attended preserved, in their columns of names and dates, the evidence of a family's entry into and continued participation in the community of the faithful. We know it because his descendants remembered — kept the stories, passed the names forward, told the children about the man who had come before all of them and whose endurance had made all of them possible.

And we know it because one of those descendants, bearing her grandmother's confirmation name and her family's history in her bones, sat down to write it out.

The Scholarly Argument, Stated in Full

This book has made a series of interrelated arguments, and the Conclusion is the appropriate place to state them plainly, in sequence, so that their cumulative weight can be felt.

The first argument is methodological. Microhistory — the sustained examination of a single life or family within its specific historical context — is not a diminished form of historical inquiry. It is a precise one. The Borée family's story could not have been told through the macro-level analysis of Reconstruction politics, or through a broad survey of Creole culture in nineteenth-century Louisiana, or through a demographic study of Black migration patterns in the postbellum South. It required the close attention that microhistory demands: the reading of a single court document, the tracing of a single middle initial across multiple names, the interpretation of a city directory entry that records nothing more than a name, an address, and an occupation — and that, read with the full context of the community it represents, tells the story of a widow who held her world together after the political order had removed the man who had stood at its center.

Genealogical history, when practiced with archival rigor and cultural literacy, is microhistory at its most intimate and most powerful. The genealogical historian who knows how to read a sacramental register, who understands the naming conventions of the Creole community, who can trace a middle initial to its likely maternal origin and a confirmation name to the grandmother whose identity it perpetuates — this historian has access to a form of evidence that conventional documentary history cannot always reach. This book has demonstrated what that access makes possible: the recovery of lives that the official record rendered marginal, the restoration of women whose contributions the documentary apparatus of their era was not designed to capture, the reconstruction of a community's internal logic from the traces it left in the records of the institution that cared most consistently about preserving them.

The second argument is historical. The resilience of the Creole community of color in Reconstruction-era Louisiana was not a passive condition — not merely the capacity to endure what the political order imposed. It was an active achievement,

produced through deliberate cultural practice and sustained through the specific institutions — the Catholic parish, the godparent network, the domestic economy of communal labor, the naming traditions that preserved maternal lineage and ancestral identity across generations — that the community had developed over the long history of its formation. When Reconstruction's political possibilities were foreclosed and the offices briefly held by men like Anatole Louis Borée were taken from them by the machinery of patronage and faction, what survived was not the political but the communal. The household on Burgundy Street. The classroom at St. Andrew Public School. The beadwork and the piano. The rosary group on North Roman Street. The Sunday Scrabble game after Mass. The grandfather on the living room floor, teaching a card game carried from the Caribbean. These were not consolations for the loss of political authority. They were the structures through which identity, dignity, and belonging were sustained — and through which the next generation was formed with the capacity to achieve what the current generation had been denied.

The third argument is cultural. Creole identity in Louisiana is not a historical artifact. It is a living practice — transmitted through naming, through faith, through the specific forms of communal labor and mutual care that the Creole tradition has always understood as the foundation of human dignity. The great-great-great-grandchildren of Anatole Louis Borée who carry his family's names into the present are not merely the biological descendants of a man who arrived from Haiti in the nineteenth century. They are the cultural inheritors of a tradition that he participated in and that participated in forming him — a tradition that survived political displacement and economic transformation and the archival catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina because it was held not only in documents but in the bodies and memories and practices of the people who lived it.

The fourth argument is personal, and it will be made in the section that follows.

What Remains Open

Scholarly honesty requires an accounting of what this book has not resolved, and the Conclusion is where that accounting belongs.

The Lavilotte hypothesis — the identification of Josephine Borée's maiden name as Lavilotte or Laviolette, based on the consistent recurrence of the middle initial "L." in the names of her daughters Marie and Adelaide — remains a hypothesis. It is a well-grounded hypothesis, supported by the naming conventions of the Creole community and consistent with the documentary evidence as it currently exists. But it awaits the sacramental confirmation that the registers of St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral may yet provide. A marriage record for Anatole Borée and Josephine Lavilotte, or a baptismal record for Marie Louise or Adelaide Lavilotte Borée, would resolve the question definitively. That document has not yet been found. The search continues.

The identity of Great Auntie Mary — the woman known in family oral tradition as having married Alec Quetant from the Cane River country — remains similarly open. The linguistic equivalence of Marie, Mary, and María across the French, English, and Spanish registers of the Creole Catholic naming tradition raises the possibility that Marie L. Borée and Great Auntie Mary are the same person. The marriage certificate of Mary and Alec Quetant, listed in Louisiana public vital records but not yet obtained for this study, is the document that could confirm or complicate this possibility. Its retrieval is identified as the most immediately productive next step in the archival investigation of this family line.

These open questions are not failures of the research. They are invitations — to future scholars, to family members who may hold documents or memories that have not yet entered the archival record, to the genealogical community whose collaborative and cumulative work makes possible exactly the kind of recovery this book undertakes. The archive is never closed. The research is never finished. What this book offers is not a final account but a rigorous beginning — a foundation on which further investigation can build, a map that marks both what has been found and where the finding continues.

The Contribution to Scholarship

From Port to Parish contributes to four intersecting bodies of scholarship, and it is worth stating those contributions explicitly before the book closes.

To the scholarship on Creole identity and culture in Louisiana, this book adds a multigenerational microhistorical study that demonstrates the active and dynamic nature of Creole cultural transmission — showing not only that the tradition survived but how it survived, through what specific practices and institutions and decisions it was carried from one generation to the next across more than a century of political and social upheaval.

To the scholarship on Reconstruction, this book adds a ground-level account of what political precarity meant in the lived experience of a specific family — not as a statistic or a trend line but as the particular circumstances of a particular man who lost a particular office and went to the docks the next morning with his dignity intact. Macro-level historical analysis is essential and irreplaceable. But it requires the correction and the enrichment that microhistory provides — the insistence that the pattern was also a person, and that the person's choices matter to our understanding of the pattern.

To the scholarship on Black Atlantic history and the Haitian diaspora, this book adds a New Orleans family whose transnational origins and commercial connections situate them within the broader circuits of Caribbean and Gulf South exchange that shaped the culture of the region in ways that a purely national framework cannot capture.

To the scholarship on women's history and the history of the family, this book adds the recovery of four women — Josephine, Marie, Adelaide, and Loretta — whose contributions to the survival and flourishing of their family are documented here for the first time as the central rather than peripheral elements of the family's history. They were not the supporting cast of a story whose protagonist was male. They were the architects of a world that endured.

A Personal Reflection: What the Research Returned to Me

I am a Seventh Ward Creole daughter, born in New Orleans, baptized at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, confirmed with the name Veronica at the same church in the name my grandmother carried, the name my first cousin carries, the name that connects me to the women who came before me in the most intimate form of connection available within the Catholic sacramental tradition.

I grew up knowing North Roman Street not as an address but as a world. I sat on my mother's lap at the kitchen table on Sunday afternoons after Mass and watched the Scrabble tiles being placed while my grandfather Henry Joseph Blanchard, usher at Corpus Christi, a man of quiet directness. A gentleman who had proposed on a porch with ten awkward words. Would pretended he could not find me when I hid beneath the claw foot dining room table. He taught me pitty-pat on the living room floor, a card game that had traveled from the Caribbean into Louisiana through the same circuits of migration that had brought my family's story to this city, to this street, to this house. I stood over the floor furnace on winter nights to warm my legs. I took bubble baths in the claw foot tub. I played outside with the shepherd lab mixes named Butches and Patches and hid under the house with them and told them my dreams in the shade.

Every porch had someone's momma or grandma or nannan sitting and watching while we played. Great Grandma Eleonora Larche Blanchard lived in that house until her death in 1975, a woman whose lineage connected us to the Florida Parishes and to France, whose presence ensured that the oldest layer of the family's memory remained alive in the daily life of the household where my mother and her siblings were being raised. I was not yet five years old for most of these memories. I carry them anyway tucked so deep in my heart there is slight ridge across the arc of my back. They are the most reliable archives I possess.

I did not know, then, that I was living inside a history. I knew only that I was inside a world, dense, warm, specific, organized around faith and food and family and the weekly movement of a Blessed Mother statue from house to house down a street that

had named itself after its people. I knew that my grandmother sewed our first communion and confirmation gowns and baked petit fours from scratch when we needed money for school trips and prayed the entire rosary on her knees every single week. I knew that the names we were given mattered and that the Church was where the family's most important moments were witnessed. I knew that the people on the porches were watching us, and that being watched in this way was not surveillance but love.

What the research returned to me is the understanding of why all of this was the way it was. The Sunday Scrabble game after Mass is the continuation of the rosary group's table after prayer, which is the continuation of Josephine's kitchen on Burgundy Street, which is the continuation of the women who cooked together and sewed together and cared for one another's children in the Tremé and the Vieux Carré and every Creole neighborhood that had ever organized itself around the conviction that survival was a communal achievement, not an individual one.

The card game on the living room floor is the continuation of the men who laid brick for their cousins and moved furniture between family households because provision, in the Creole tradition, is a form of love. The nannans on the porches are the continuation of every godmother who ever stood at a baptismal font and made a promise she intended to keep and lit a candle for every prayer she held in her heart.

My second great-grandfather Anatole Louis Borée arrived at the port of New Orleans from Haiti carrying that tradition within him. He did not quit when the effort cost him his office. He did not disappear when the political order withdrew its recognition. He went to the docks. He came home. He endured. And the endurance moved through Josephine's household, through Marie's classroom, through Adelaide's beadwork and her piano, through Loretta's pattern pieces and her petit fours and the name she gave her daughter who gave it to me until it arrived on North Roman Street, in a house with a claw foot tub and a floor furnace and a man who pretended he could not find me, and I was there to receive it.

This book is what I owe for that reception. It is offered in the memory of Anatole Louis Borée and Josephine Lavilotte Borée, of Marie L. Borée and Adelaide Borée

Perret, of Loretta Adelaide Perret Blanchard and Henry Joseph Blanchard, and of Eleonora Larche Blanchard, who lived in the house on North Roman Street until 1975 and whose presence there was itself a form of testimony. It is offered in gratitude to every descendant who kept a story, preserved a name, passed down an earring, baked a petit four, kneeled at a rosary, or simply showed up which is, in the end, the whole of what endurance requires.

Rest, if you must. But never quit.

— Shannon M. Bennett Santiesteban, LL.M., Ed.D.
New Orleans, Louisiana
Seventh Ward Creole daughter
Direct descendant of Anatole Louis Borée

Notes

1. The Lavilotte hypothesis is advanced as a working conclusion pending confirmation through marriage and baptismal records not yet located in the archives of St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

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The Shape of the Book

From Port to Parish unfolds across seven chapters, each of which addresses a distinct dimension of the Borée family's history while contributing to the book's central argument about resilience, continuity, and the endurance of Creole identity across generations.

The opening chapters situate Anatole Louis Borée within the world he inhabited: the port city of New Orleans, its Creole class structures, its political upheavals, and its transnational commercial networks. The middle chapters follow the family through the instabilities of Reconstruction and into the aftermath, the shift from public office to manual labor, the death of Anatole, and the remarkable household that Josephine and Marie sustained in his absence, the migration of Adelaide into the Cane River region and its Creole communities. The closing chapters trace the long arc of generational continuity, following the Borée line through the Perret family and into the Seventh Ward of New Orleans, where Loretta Perret Blanchard represents a family that has traveled far and returned changed, rooted, and enduring.

Throughout, the book returns to a single animating conviction: that the instinct to rest but never quit to adapt without surrendering identity, to move without losing the thread of who you are, is not merely a family trait. It is a historical phenomenon. It is the story of Creole Louisiana in the age of Reconstruction, told through the lives of people who lived it without knowing that history was watching.

My second great-grandfather would be proud, I believe. Not because his descendants became educators and doctors and lawyers and judges, though they did. But because they carried him forward. Because his name is still spoken. Because this book exists.

II. The Scholarly Argument, Stated in Full

This book has made a series of interrelated arguments, and the Conclusion is the appropriate place to state them plainly, in sequence, so that their cumulative weight can be felt.

The first argument is methodological. Microhistory — the sustained examination of a single life or family within its specific historical context — is not a diminished form of historical inquiry. It is a precise one. The Borée family's story could not have been told through the macro-level analysis of Reconstruction politics, or through a broad survey of Creole culture in nineteenth-century Louisiana, or through a demographic study of Black migration patterns in the postbellum South. It required the close attention that microhistory demands: the reading of a single court document, the tracing of a single middle initial across multiple names, the interpretation of a city directory entry that records nothing more than a name, an address, and an occupation — and that, read with the full context of the community it represents, tells the story of a widow who held her world together after the political order had removed the man who had stood at its center.

Genealogical history, when practiced with archival rigor and cultural literacy, is microhistory at its most intimate and most powerful. The genealogical historian who knows how to read a sacramental register, who understands the naming conventions of the Creole community, who can trace a middle initial to its likely maternal origin and a confirmation name to the grandmother whose identity it perpetuates — this historian has access to a form of evidence that conventional documentary history cannot always reach. This book has demonstrated what that access makes possible: the recovery of lives that the official record rendered marginal, the restoration of women whose contributions the documentary apparatus of their era was not designed to capture, the reconstruction of a community's internal logic from the traces it left in the records of the institution that cared most consistently about preserving them.

The second argument is historical. The resilience of the Creole community of color in Reconstruction-era Louisiana was not a passive condition — not merely the capacity to endure what the political order imposed. It was an active achievement,

produced through deliberate cultural practice and sustained through the specific institutions — the Catholic parish, the godparent network, the domestic economy of communal labor, the naming traditions that preserved maternal lineage and ancestral identity across generations — that the community had developed over the long history of its formation. When Reconstruction's political possibilities were foreclosed and the offices briefly held by men like Anatole Louis Borée were taken from them by the machinery of patronage and faction, what survived was not the political but the communal. The household on Burgundy Street. The classroom at St. Andrew Public School. The beadwork and the piano. The rosary group on North Roman Street. The Sunday Scrabble game after Mass. The grandfather on the living room floor, teaching a card game carried from the Caribbean. These were not consolations for the loss of political authority. They were the structures through which identity, dignity, and belonging were sustained — and through which the next generation was formed with the capacity to achieve what the current generation had been denied.

The third argument is cultural. Creole identity in Louisiana is not a historical artifact. It is a living practice — transmitted through naming, through faith, through the specific forms of communal labor and mutual care that the Creole tradition has always understood as the foundation of human dignity. The great-great-great-grandchildren of Anatole Louis Borée who carry his family's names into the present are not merely the biological descendants of a man who arrived from Haiti in the nineteenth century. They are the cultural inheritors of a tradition that he participated in and that participated in forming him — a tradition that survived political displacement and economic transformation and the archival catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina because it was held not only in documents but in the bodies and memories and practices of the people who lived it.

The fourth argument is personal, and it will be made in the section that follows.

III. What Remains Open

Scholarly honesty requires an accounting of what this book has not resolved, and the Conclusion is where that accounting belongs.

The Lavilotte hypothesis — the identification of Josephine Borée's maiden name as Lavilotte or Laviolette, based on the consistent recurrence of the middle initial "L." in the names of her daughters Marie and Adelaide — remains a hypothesis. It is a well-grounded hypothesis, supported by the naming conventions of the Creole community and consistent with the documentary evidence as it currently exists. But it awaits the sacramental confirmation that the registers of St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Louis Cathedral may yet provide. A marriage record for Anatole Borée and Josephine Lavilotte, or a baptismal record for Marie Louise or Adelaide Lavilotte Borée, would resolve the question definitively. That document has not yet been found. The search continues.

The identity of Great Auntie Mary — the woman known in family oral tradition as having married Alec Quetant from the Cane River country — remains similarly open. The linguistic equivalence of Marie, Mary, and María across the French, English, and Spanish registers of the Creole Catholic naming tradition raises the possibility that Marie L. Borée and Great Auntie Mary are the same person. The marriage certificate of Mary and Alec Quetant, listed in Louisiana public vital records but not yet obtained for this study, is the document that could confirm or complicate this possibility. Its retrieval is identified as the most immediately productive next step in the archival investigation of this family line.

These open questions are not failures of the research. They are invitations — to future scholars, to family members who may hold documents or memories that have not yet entered the archival record, to the genealogical community whose collaborative and cumulative work makes possible exactly the kind of recovery this book undertakes. The archive is never closed. The research is never finished. What this book offers is not a final account but a rigorous beginning — a foundation on which further investigation can build, a map that marks both what has been found and where the finding continues.

IV. The Contribution to Scholarship

From Port to Parish contributes to four intersecting bodies of scholarship, and it is worth stating those contributions explicitly before the book closes.

To the scholarship on Creole identity and culture in Louisiana, this book adds a multigenerational microhistorical study that demonstrates the active and dynamic nature of Creole cultural transmission — showing not only that the tradition survived but how it survived, through what specific practices and institutions and decisions it was carried from one generation to the next across more than a century of political and social upheaval.

To the scholarship on Reconstruction, this book adds a ground-level account of what political precarity meant in the lived experience of a specific family — not as a statistic or a trend line but as the particular circumstances of a particular man who lost a particular office and went to the docks the next morning with his dignity intact. Macro-level historical analysis is essential and irreplaceable. But it requires the correction and the enrichment that microhistory provides — the insistence that the pattern was also a person, and that the person's choices matter to our understanding of the pattern.

To the scholarship on Black Atlantic history and the Haitian diaspora, this book adds a New Orleans family whose transnational origins and commercial connections situate them within the broader circuits of Caribbean and Gulf South exchange that shaped the culture of the region in ways that a purely national framework cannot capture.

To the scholarship on women's history and the history of the family, this book adds the recovery of four women — Josephine, Marie, Adelaide, and Loretta — whose contributions to the survival and flourishing of their family are documented here for the first time as the central rather than peripheral elements of the family's history. They were not the supporting cast of a story whose protagonist was male. They were the architects of a world that endured.

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petit four, kneeled at a rosary, or simply showed up — which is, in the end, the whole of what endurance requires.

Rest, if you must. But do not quit.

Il faut continuer. We must continue.

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